

Springboard to Heaven

The Jojo Sayson Adventure



*Discovering Your
Unlimited Potential
in Mind, Body & Spirit*

Jojo Sayson
and **James Riordan**
Introduction by **Leo Riingen**

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by Jojo Sayson

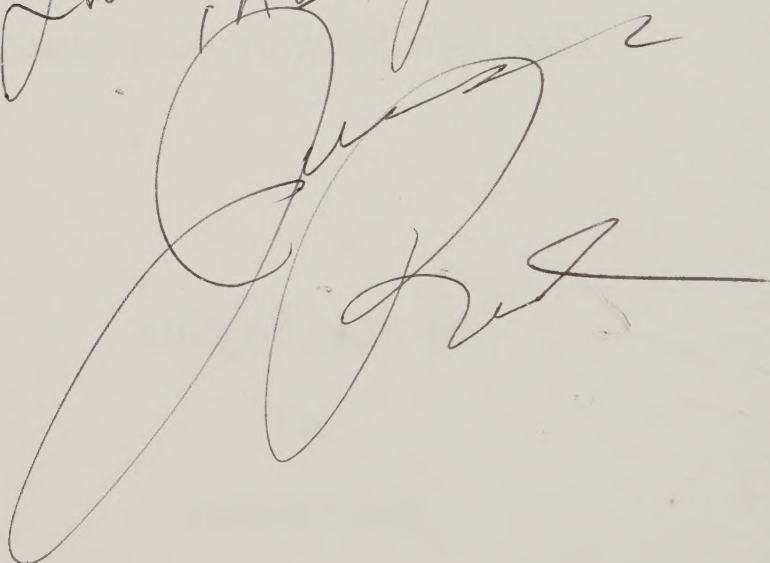
and

James Riordan

IMAGE WORKSHOP PRESS

2012

Patty,
Thanks!
Look for me though
in all you do!



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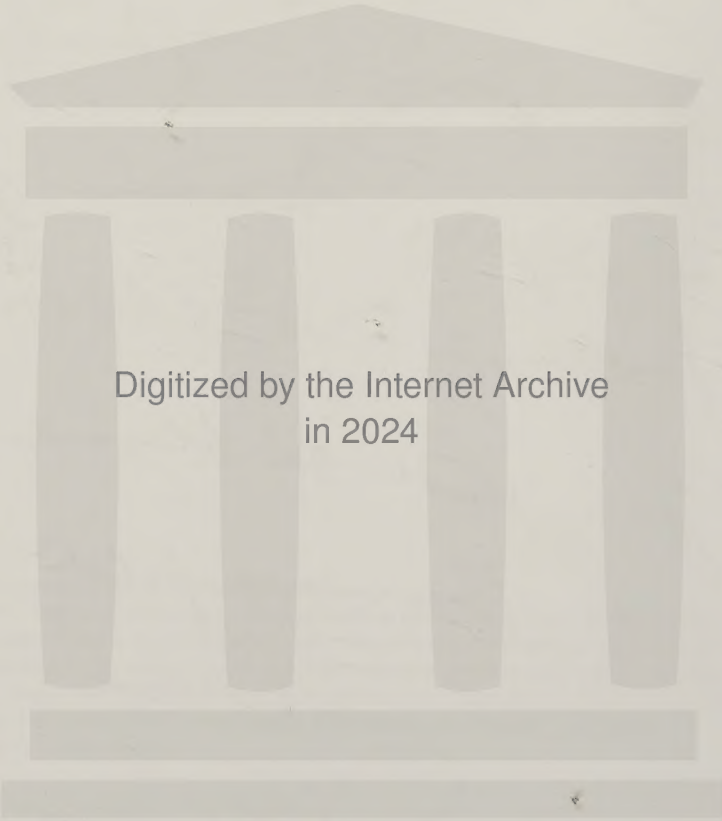
Dear Patty,

I see & feel God
in you. Thank you
for your mission of
kindness to children.

You will be blessed
a thousand fold.

Prayer,

Jay Jay



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“Lord,
grant me the wisdom of Solomon,
the heart of David,
the strength of Samson,
and I shall extol thy name
in all that I do”

Jojo Sayson

*

For my Dad
Alfredo C. Sayson
(1937-1992)

for my Mom,
Elvina, who taught me
how to dream,

for Nancy,
for your love and trust

and for Jade,
in whom I found the reason to live



Introduction

by Leo Riingen

(President, Informatics College, Philippines
Jojo's High School & lifetime friend)

I once asked a friend to meet Jojo Sayson in a hotel lobby. She asked me over the phone how she would recognize him. I told her not to worry – she would easily spot him because of his powerful presence. She found him. People who meet Jojo never forget him. Aside from his visual presence, he packs a vocal timbre and enunciation that makes its mark as well. A few minutes of talking to him is all it takes. An hour or more with him either makes one a fan or a critic. Whichever, no one forgets Jojo.

I first met Joselito Valcos Sayson at the Royal Pontifical University of Santo Tomas High School in España, Manila. The university, founded in 1611, is the oldest Pontifical University in Asia. It is run by Dominican priests and in our time, they were mostly Spanish. Our parents expect mischievous kids like us to get disciplined and religious after attending a school run by priest. There might be empirical data to support this correlation - Jojo and I were as mischievous as most and now we both have disciplined and God-fearing lives.

Jojo sat near or behind me in most of my high school classes. That made us seatmates, and occasionally in emergency cases during difficult exams cheat-mates from time to time. In one examination, I heard voices asking me for answers. Then, I saw Jojo staring at the ceiling. His lips were motionless but words were coming out of his mouth. I thought then that he would make a good ventriloquist someday. While most kids were reticent Jojo was the opposite. If he knew the answer which

was frequently, he would stand up and confidently speak it with a loud voice. Even if he was wrong his confidence was enough to make it sound correct.

There was a famous sports announcer during our time known as Jo Cantada. He had a distinct articulate voice, a well-built body and well groomed hair, all of which Jojo had as well. That got him the alias of Jojo "Cantada" Sayson which he received with good humor. I will always remember Jojo at our prom. He wore a John Travolta Saturday Night Fever suit and he danced like Tony Manero in the movie – even twirling his coat over his head. I envied him because of the attention he got from the girls. He livened up the party but the boys never dared to copy him. At our High School, no one wanted attention by dressing differently. We were afraid that someone would call us "baduy" – a Filipino term given to people who did not conform and were not in tune with the times. Jojo was teased and called "Kid Baduyetski" by our classmates but he didn't mind. He got all the chicks' attention.

Jojo and I saw each other again in 2005, twenty-five years after we graduated from high school. I have a group of classmates from high school and the University of the Philippines who bonded together through the years and still meet together once in a while. One of our members, Rey Espino, decided to form a yahoo group, to get our high school classmates together for our upcoming Silver Jubilee. Jojo came on board early and it seemed as if it had only been a few months since we got separated in high school

A quarter of a century is a long time for two friends to separate, but when I saw Jojo at our high school jubilee celebration, he was still in great shape, as fit as I remembered him. In high school I thought that people who did bodybuilding just wanted to get the attention of girls. For Jojo, that seems to be just a fringe benefit because he does it for himself. It is a discipline of mind

controlling the body. For that alone, Jojo got my respect and admiration.

I am an avid amateur photographer. When Jojo learned about my predilection for model shoots, he showed me the shots done on him personifying characters like Batman, Conan the Barbarian or muscled men on the silver screen. I do not normally shoot male models but Jojo's expressions in his shoots got me interested to shoot him as a model. So every time he comes to Manila for a visit, a photo shoot was always in the itinerary. Jojo is a natural model. On top of having a body that registers well in light, Jojo is a patient and relaxed subject. For photographers, creativity comes out easily with a cooperative subject. While Jojo gets a good model portfolio, I, too, get shots for my photography collection.

Jojo has always loved superheroes. For the last several years, he has visited children's hospitals in the costume of a superhero. Jojo became Superman or Batman to these sick kids and gave them the treat of seeing, touching, hearing and connecting with an otherwise imaginary character. The smiles he brings them manifests a higher feeling of accomplishment and hope for those kids.

I saw Jojo in action as superhero during our outreach program to kids who are cancer patients at CHILD Haus, a halfway house for poor children undergoing chemotherapy in public hospitals in Manila. He was Superman. The kids were amazed. They started touching him and feeling his muscles to check on the man of steel. At some point, I saw Superman Jojo shed a tear after receiving handwritten thank you letters from the kids. The man of steel apparently does not have heart of steel after all.

Jojo's school life in the Philippines was not without hardship. We both grew up in the streets of Manila where the comforts and luxuries were not afforded to us when we were

young. We did not ride cars or school buses to school; we took the jeepneys or if our allowances ran out, we walked in hot, humid days. We did not eat complete meals that had soup, entrees and desserts; we could only afford a single entree and multiple cups of rice sold in the canteen or sidewalk eateries. Our school uniforms oftentimes got yellowed from everyday use and constant laundry. Our families were middle-income families that could afford only the essentials. So when Jojo and I met and discussed how our lives progressed since our high school days, we can't help but be grateful to the blessings God has given us. The comforts we now have we owe to the years of hard work, patience and the Christian values we continue to practice. Jojo shared with me his journey from college to what he is now. It was not without bumps, tears and humiliation. His faith was even tested and he came through. The wisdom he got from these hardships formed his character and core values.

Jojo now lives in an area far from the hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan Chicago. I got a good taste of his domicile when he brought me to his place in his military-style Hummer H2 truck, a prized possession that is quite consistent with his character – colorful, different yet tough and sturdy. His super truck is even fitted with six deactivated missiles on top and a removable machine gun! As a physical therapist, his office is well equipped with an inspired staff to boot. His doctorate in Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapy catapults him to one of the best in his field. This did not get unnoticed as his accomplishments got him the highest award given by his Alma Mater – The Outstanding Thomasian Alumnus Award or the University of Santo Tomas TOTAL Award in Health and Allied Services, a distinguished award given to a select few. He was not able to get his award personally because he was on a parabolic zero-gravity flight over the Gulf of Mexico during that time. He nonetheless delivered his acceptance speech via a recorded video showing him floating weightless in a Boeing

727. It is just one of the many impressive acts only Jojo can conceive.

Jojo is not rich in material wealth by the standards of American living. It makes me wonder how he gives out a lot of his time travelling to Manila, spending for plane tickets and keeping himself busy during month-long stays. While others tend to look for ways to earn during their stay, Jojo looks for charity to share his fortune. Jojo's style of philanthropy comes from the heart. I can only surmise, that this can only be done by person who has a big heart or has experienced suffering and tasted hardships in life. Jojo got them all. Lately, he put up a Foundation to garner and bridge the support of people in North America with people who are in need in the Philippines. Jojo tapped people's talents, synergized his connections, and energized a group of people from different fields and locations to share a philanthropic goal. He called it Project Michelangelo.

Back in high school, I have heard Jojo proclaim some of the impossible things he wanted to do. Jojo's declarations were like literally reaching for the stars. Jojo, I learned later, pursued those dreams. Jojo is not just a dreamer. They say that people who pursue dreams are visionaries. They turn dreams to reality. And I think Jojo qualifies to be a visionary. The big thing that Jojo dreamt of was to be an astronaut. I guess everyone in class in our school were amazed with people like Aldrin and Armstrong going to the moon. We were in our primary years when the moon landing took place and it sure did make tots like us dream to be one.

Jojo never outgrew it. He pursued the dream and he is still chasing it. With his doctorate in Physical Therapy, Jojo contributes his expertise to the US space program in making space travel safe for humans. His studies are NASA material and he hoped someday he qualifies to ride with them to space. I once told him that he need not be in space to be an astronaut. He

can pursue his NASA dreams by not being one of the astronauts in space, but being with them here on earth. Someone has to man Houston while Armstrong mans the rocket. Oftentimes, we get something that may not be served the way we want it. I guess Jojo gets his dreams, his visions, but not necessarily in the normal route he expected. It may seem to be frustrating him but his determination to turn dreams to reality just gets him going.

Jojo – the classmate, the “Kid Baduyetski,” the muscleman, Superman, Batman, the philanthropist, the astronaut, the dreamer, the visionary, the loving father to Jade, the loyal husband to Nancy, the model, the tap dancer, the life of the party, the batchmate, the bodybuilder, the artist, the brother and friend to many. His descriptions and roles are far too many. Is he a character? That is an understatement. This book will certainly amaze, charm and inspire you, the reader. You will get to know Jojo. And if someday you find yourself looking for him in a crowded room, don’t worry. He stands out. He will be the one looking like an action hero. And, in many ways, he is just that.

Part One

The Philippines

Chapter One

Beginnings

"I have called you by name: you are mine"
[Isaiah 43:1]

It seems to be one of the great mysteries of humanity that one person can excel to wondrous feats and heights far above the circumstances of their birth, while all around him or her others seem chained to those same circumstances. On the surface, little about the birth of Jojo Sayson would lead one to suspect he would grow up to accomplish so much in so many aspects of life. But if one looks closer, there were signs – tiny seeds that could have blown away with the winds of life, but in this case were carefully nourished to produce something unique.

Joselito Valcos Sayson was born in the city of Manila on the island of Luzon in the Philippine Islands on June 19, 1963. He was raised during the height of the reign of Ferdinand Marcos, the legendary dictator/president who, though he is remembered in America for his excesses and those of his wife Imelda, propelled the Islands to their peak economic position.

The government of the Philippines was patterned after the democracy of the United States because the Islands had been a commonwealth of America for many years. The country was a strong ally of the United States during the Second World War and U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur, who liberated the Islands from the Japanese, is a hero there.

At the time of Sayson's birth, The Philippines was ranked one of the top five countries in Southeast Asia economically, and was a major exporter of rice. Today, it has fallen behind greatly and even must import rice. Part of this decline is due to the ever-

increasing population, which went from 42 million in 1986 to 92 million only twenty years later. The nation being eighty percent Catholic, birth control is not practiced very much, especially among the poor, and they continue to grow in vast numbers. There are many families who toil planting rice for a wage of about 120 pesos, roughly about \$1.50 American a day.

Life under Marcos was comparatively good, especially for those with some financial substance, such as the Sayson family. Though they would have been considered very poor by American standards, the Saysons were middle class in the poverty-stricken Philippines. They had their own house and the three children were provided decent food and education.

Jojo was born at a hospital named after St. Rita, the patron saint of the impossible, perhaps an early sign of the life he was to live. He weighed 9 pounds at birth which is about twice the weight of a typical Filipino baby then. For one who would go on to become known for his physical prowess this certainly was a healthy start.

Sayson's paternal grandfather Pedro had been a very wealthy man but through a strange twist of fate the riches were gone by the time Jojo was six years old. Pedro had amassed nearly nine million US dollars from his holdings in the Islands' tobacco industry in the 1960s, a mega-fortune for the Philippines then, but when he passed away the money went with him. An intensely private man, he had never revealed to the family any detailed information on his holdings – not the bank accounts, nor the stocks and bonds. So when he died no one knew where the money was and his children and grandchildren went from being very rich to having to fend for themselves. Jojo, with his typical philosophical attitude, has never looked at this as a defeat. "To me this was a very valuable lesson about what happens when you hoard money," he said. "Money is meant to flow. Sure, you set aside savings and make investments, but anything that is hoarded will vanish over time."

While Sayson's father, Alfredo, had grown up wealthy in Manila, his mother, Elvina, was at the opposite end of the spectrum, coming from a very poor farming family in Maronquillo, San Rafael, Bulacan, one of the outlying rural provinces. She grew up planting the fields, using that great beast of burden, the carabao (water buffalo), to fertilize and plow.

Sayson's parents had a classic love story. She had nothing and then along came her Prince Charming, relates Jojo: "My mother told me that when she was living the poor life working all day in the fields, she would ask herself, 'Am I going to live like this the rest of my life? Will I marry another poor farmer and then be forced to watch my children suffer in the fields like I am suffering? I don't want my children to have to live like this.' She would look up to the sky and see the airplanes passing overhead and ask herself, 'How do those people get up to the plane? Is there a great ladder that they have to climb? I want to ride in one of those planes and leave this place.' She made a decision during her younger years that her children would not have to grow up that way doing the same humdrum, back-breaking work every day. So my dream of a better life really started with my mother. She was like the poor servant girl in Cinderella who longed for something different and then she met my father who was from a rich family and he changed her life just like the prince in the story."

Sayson's given name is Joselito. "Jose" means "Joseph" and "lito" means "the little one" so his name means "Little Joseph" or "Joseph Junior". He was named by Pedro, his paternal grandfather after the national hero of the Philippines, Jose Rizal. Like Jojo, Rizal was born on June 19, but in 1861, and his writings inspired the Islands to fight for their independence. At that time, the Philippines was a colony of Spain and Spain had prevented books from Europe reaching the Islands because it didn't want the people to learn about the French revolution. Dr. Rizal wrote the

masterpiece novels “Noli me Tangere (Touch me not)” and “El Filibusterismo (The Filibustering)” that depicted Spanish cruelty to the Philippines as a backdrop to the stories and the people began to rally around them. He was executed by the government as a subversive influence, and that became a rallying point for the Philippine revolution. “Dr. Rizal was a renaissance man,” said Sayson. “He spoke twenty-two languages and had traveled the world and learned how other nations had gained their freedom. Being named after him inspired me to parallel his life in some ways. He obtained his Doctor of Medicine degree at the Royal Pontifical University of Santo Tomas and was the first recipient of the highest award of that university. Many years later I would receive the same award. Now our names are together as two of its distinguished graduates.”

But there was more to the christening than the name. Pedro Sayson had made the sign of the cross with his thumb on baby Jojo’s forehead and said, “Joselito, you will follow in my footsteps.” In many ways, Jojo did just that.

The Filipino family is male-dominated, which means the father of the household typically is the decision maker. (At the same time, the wife is considered the queen of the home, and given high respect. She usually takes care of all the household finances and domestic duties.) Even though the family member with the most knowledge of the situation might make recommendations, it is important that the father has the final say. Otherwise it would be considered an insult. Jojo’s family, though more educated than most, still operated under this principle.

Jojo and his family lived in an area of Manila where there was a great deal of poverty, and most of the children he grew up with didn’t have much. Alfredo had been educated as an engineer, but he and Elvina operated a neighborhood grocery store in Gagalangin, Tondo, Manila. It was a lucrative business and the Saysons’ was one of the better houses. The family ate

adequate meals and wore decent clothes. They even had a radio and a television.

Jojo has one brother, James Alfred, and one sister, Jeraldine. But like most Filipino families, the Saysons had relatives living with them: since his mother's siblings were so poor, his father was kind enough to allow Elvina's brothers and a sister to stay in their home while they attended high school. In fact, Alfredo Sayson helped all his in-laws who wished to go to school or obtain some kind of vocational degree.

And as do most Filipinos, the Saysons also took care of their elderly. The only type of home for the elderly in the Philippines then was called a "Home for the Aged" and it was for the people who had no family at all. It is considered improper for a Filipino family to ignore their elderly, so it is very common for several generations to be living together under the same roof.

Today Jojo Sayson is well known for his lectures, which exhibit a strong leaning towards spirituality and philosophy. This side of him began in his childhood. "When I was little," he recalled, "I always had a sense that I had come from somewhere other than this world. I did not have the words to describe it but I always had this awareness of self and the spiritual aspect of my being. When I was little, whenever I would hear classical music I would close my eyes and imagine I was in this grand palace. But it was always as though it was someplace that I had actually been. Every time I listen to classical music, even today, it triggers something that feels like memories – and they are memories of a place that I've never been as a human being, -- grand places, like castles. And when I would be naughty as a small child and get a spanking I would cry and talk to God and say, "Why do you let them hurt me? Why don't you take me home?"

These feelings crystallized in a dramatic dream that Sayson had when he was four or five years old in which he was in an all-white place that seemed to have no dimensions. "There

was no sense of height or depth, almost like a whiteout during a snowstorm,” he remembered. “But it was very peaceful. There was a man who walked in front of me who was wearing a white robe. I tried looking up but somehow my visual field would only come to his shoulders and would not allow me to see his face. Then the man reached his hands out to me like he was going to pick me up and I saw that they had nail holes in them, so I assume he was Jesus. He had this wonderful presence. Then I woke up. It was very beautiful.”

The Saysons were devout Roman Catholic, like the vast majority of Filipinos, and were somewhat shocked when their son told them of his dream. The family lived beside the St. Joseph church and Alfredo Sayson was a member of the Knights of Columbus, but nothing had prepared them for their young son’s vision of heaven. “All my life I feel like I have found more and more reasons to believe that there is a higher intelligence,” Sayson said. “I have always felt that God gave us life and certain talents for a purpose. When I meet my Maker and He asks me what I have done with my life, I want to have a long list of answers. It certainly won’t be perfect because as a human I make mistakes, but I will know that I would have done the best that I could.”

Fortunately for Jojo and the numerous people who have benefited from his many accomplishments, the elder Saysons were parents who encouraged their children’s talents. If one of the children showed an interest in something, they did their best to help the child pursue that interest. So it was that when his parents saw Jojo drawing on the sidewalk, they gave him boxes of chalk until he had covered the pavement in front of their home and the grocery store with spaceships and animals and people. When the walk was full they gave him a sketch pad. “I drew and I drew. I’d draw whatever I’d see and whatever was on television. I would draw a lot of human figures and most of the time they were heroes -- soldiers and superheroes, people with muscles and

flying spacemen. But I'd also draw dinosaurs and the typical fantastic adventures of a child. I got in trouble because, if I found a marker, I would draw on the walls so my parents always made sure I had paper to draw and write on. When I was 10 or 11, I even tried copying sketches by Michelangelo and da Vinci that I found in the encyclopedia."

Jojo was the oldest," his mother, Elvina, recalled. "So he got the most attention. He was the first grandson from my side of the family and the newest grandchild then from my husband's side of the family. For a while we were living with my mother-in-law and father-in-law and Jojo was the only baby in the house. So he got a lot of attention when he was young."

Sayson also sculpted objects out of modeling clay and he loved doing that too. To this day he regularly engages in many activities purely for the joy of creating. "I realized early on that creating is really a Godly thing," he muses. "God created and we too should exercise that part of our brains. Some people are depressed because they are not using both sides of their brain, the right side for creativity and the left side for logical thinking. We are given these talents and we should use them, especially if we can use them in a way that helps out another person somehow. If what you do can cheer-up people or gives them new ideas that help them cope with life, or if you can sing and uplift someone's spirit, then you should do it."

At age six, Jojo went to kindergarten attending a La Consolacion School then later transferred to a parochial school named after St. Joseph, his patron saint. It was run by nuns from the order of the Daughters of Charity. His mother had tried to send him to nursery school, but says he only lasted one day and then refused to go back because it was boring.

Jojo's ambitions began early. In first grade, he wanted to be a doctor. "I remember him wanting to be involved in medicine from the time he was little," Elvina recalled. "Every time he

would see a cat or a dog limping he would pick it up, bandage it and make a splint for it.”

But there were two other careers Jojo was interested in as well -- becoming a scientist and an astronaut. The latter dream began on July 20, 1969 when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon and seven year-old Jojo and his father watched it on their grainy black and white TV set. No doubt if his father had lived to see his son become part of the American space program and friends with astronauts, he would have been very proud.

In third grade, Jojo began attending a school right beside the St. Joseph church next to the apartment where the Sayson's lived called St. Joseph Parochial School. Sayson remembered his childhood as near idyllic, especially for someone growing up in the Philippines: “I pretty much enjoyed those days being friends with the children in the neighborhood. Most of the people who lived near us were poor or at best, middle class, which would still be considered poor by American standards. I would play with the poor neighborhood kids and sometimes we would share food. Once I got infected with Ascaris worms from doing that, but in a way that was good because I probably needed to be exposed to some of that to build my immunity for the diseases that were prevalent there.”

“Jojo has always had a giving heart,” his mother Elvina said. “When he was young he was very generous to his playmates. He would always ask me for money so he could buy food for his friends.”

Not all Sayson's ventures were successful.⁶ He tried to become an altar boy, but lost interest in it. His attempts at piano lessons were an even worse experience. “I really used to be afraid of the nuns,” he recalled. I took piano lessons with a nun after school when I was in second grade. I would sit by her at the piano with my legs dangling from the bench and she had a big German Shepherd dog that would lay on the floor by us and I was always

afraid he was going to bite my leg. "The nun had a wooden ruler and she would hit my fingers whenever I messed up, so here I was trying to play and all the time worrying about the ruler and the dog. My hands would sweat so badly because of fear that the white piano keys would get muddy from my dirty hands."

Like most boys, Jojo Sayson had pets, but having pets in the Philippines is not always the same as it is in America. The only people who bond with their pets there are the very wealthy ones. Thus it was not a huge surprise when one of the neighbors ate Jojo's dog. "Dogs there are not treated like dogs in America," he said. "They live outside and they eat scraps. I had a white dog and her name was Tops. We would let Tops run loose and she would always come back, but then she started going farther and farther and one day she didn't come home. I called and called for her and one of the neighbors told me that another neighbor had recently killed a white dog and had eaten it. In our culture, men come together sometimes and drink beer or hard liquor with a big pitcher and one glass that they pass all around. It's a macho bonding thing, but they also like something to munch on when they do that and most of the time it is a stray dog. They would find a stray dog, kill it and roast it. The neighbor said that some of them had found this white dog and killed it to eat."

The ironic twist to this story is that the killer became the victim. The man who killed Sayson's dog was himself killed on his way home. He was very drunk and walked off carrying a dog leg when he got into a fight and was stabbed. He died still holding the dog's leg.

Sayson also remembers having a pet turtle which he named Gamera because, in the early 1970s, Japanese monster movies like Godzilla were all the rage in the Philippines and Gamera was the name of a gigantic space turtle in some of the films. "My grandfather on my mother's side, Tatang Memo, found this turtle in the rice paddies and gave it to me. They live for a long time but

eventually there was some flooding that carried Gamera away. At least he didn't get eaten."

A much more traumatic event occurred when Sayson was only ten years old and was an eyewitness to a murder. He had gone out to play one afternoon when he heard a commotion down the alley from his yard. Peeking through his gate he saw a man being beaten by three other men. Then the men pulled out knives and stabbed him until he fell to the ground. When the killers fled in his direction Sayson ducked down and locked the gate. After they had run past, Jojo came out of his gate and approached the injured man with fatal stab wounds. "There was blood everywhere," he recalled. "His intestines spilled out and he was vomiting blood then I saw his last breath."

Realizing the man was dead, Sayson went inside and told his mother and father. His mother said not to say anything about it, but later, after the police had arrived, he wound up telling them what he saw anyway. The police took him to the precinct so they could question him. They soon caught the three men who still had blood all over them. "I had got bored waiting at the precinct after I gave my statement and I walked around the building. I heard moaning and crying and groaning and pleading. I didn't understand what they were saying, but I heard a man pleading. I tried to find where it was and there was this door that was ajar and I looked in. It was the three prisoners being interrogated. They were tied to a bench that was at around a 45 degree angle. The police were pouring water on them, like water-boarding. The men kept saying they didn't do it, but it was pretty obvious they did since they had blood all over them. But the police couldn't find the knives because the men had thrown them away. It became obvious to me that the police would do anything to get the statement. Then later I went to court and they asked me who killed the man so I pointed to the three and I said him, him & him. I sent three men to jail in 1974 for murder."

Sayson later learned that the murder had been over an unpaid debt and that another boy, the son of a neighbor police sergeant, had also seen the killing. The men were due to be released after only six years and the other boy who had seen the murder told Jojo that his father said that sometimes the prisoners come back to get revenge. “The next thing I heard through the grapevine was that the men had disappeared. Sometimes, back then, the authorities would take prisoners far away and execute them. It was a common thing but it was not well publicized. So these three men disappeared. My mom and dad were glad they wouldn’t be coming back. I remember being scared that the spirit of the man who was murdered might come and haunt me. It happened in front of this factory where there are a lot of southern island workers from the Visayan Islands and they are very superstitious. After the murder they poured gasoline where the puddle of blood was and set it on fire. They said they were afraid of being haunted.”

So, by the age of ten, Jojo Sayson had already experienced the supernatural and become acquainted with death in its darkest manifestation – murder. Perhaps these were coincidences. Or perhaps he was being prepared for a life far different from the other children in his Manila neighborhood.

Chapter Two

Turning Dreams Into Reality

“The future belongs to those who believe
in the beauty of their dreams”

- Eleanor Roosevelt”

Even as a teenager, one of the things that set Jojo Sayson apart was his desire to learn. Though his parents went to great lengths to get him the best education they could manage, he still strove to learn more on his own. Sharing a room with his brother James, Jojo would sit up at night reading the encyclopedia and trying to increase his vocabulary by studying Webster’s dictionary, memorizing three to ten words a day. It was in the encyclopedia where he discovered how fascinating the human anatomy could be, studying the plastic layover sheets that revealed the complicated layers of muscles and nerves. It was also in these late night studies that he became more and more fascinated with America. “My parents gave me this globe and I would sit in my room with a flashlight and slowly turn the globe, seeing how the rotation of the earth produced daytime on one side while the other was night time. I would turn off the lights and look at all the wonderful places there where I wanted to go someday. I would look at the Philippines and trace a line to America and think that someday I would go there.”

Sayson is a man who believes that much of our destiny is formed by the matters we think and especially by those thoughts which crystallize into hopes and dreams. So, when he looks back on the boy with the flashlight and the globe, he sees someone who was forming dreams – dreams which would in fact manifest as reality within a relatively short time.

Like all young boys these dreams included becoming a hero. For young Jojo Sayson the ultimate hero was Superman. He first became acquainted with the legend when his Uncle Ricardo on his father's side came back from Saigon after the Vietnam War. He brought back comic books that had been thrown away by GIs and when he got tired of them he gave them to young Jojo. "I kept those old comic books and I read them intensely and I think it formed a core belief about heroism in me. I used to say that when I grew up I wanted to be a superhero. And I meant it." "When Jojo was young he wanted to be Superman," Elvina Sayson remembered. "Even as a child he always took the role of a leader. In boy scouts, he was the leader. When he and his playmates played game, he was the leader. He wanted to be Superman and in a way he still does. And, in some ways, when it comes to helping people, he is a superman of sorts."

Jojo soon realized that he wanted to have the physical form of a superhero as well. He had always been a healthy boy, but in 1973, when the family moved to a house in a part of Manila called Balut, Tondo, he began to focus on building up his muscles. "When we moved in I found this old rusty barbell there. It weighed about 40 pounds and I lifted it all the time. I studied on my own and did curls and pushups and overheads. I began to develop some muscles. I was still skinny but compared to most of the kids I hung out with I was sort of muscular."

In the Philippines, high school begins after the 6th grade, so by the time he was 12, Jojo Sayson was attending the Royal Pontifical University of Santo Tomas High School.⁷ High school in the Philippines lasts for four years, as it does in America, but the days were longer and there was less time off for summer vacation. Back then, the Spanish Dominican priests who were in charge of the university were very strict about its separation of girls and boys, which perhaps made it a bit easier for Jojo to focus on his studies.

Although Sayson had many friends during his earlier years it wasn't until high school that he had what he would call a best friend. His name was John Talabis and the two maintain contact to this day. Talabis remembers the day he met Jojo: "We were lining up to go into the building for the first day of high school and he was standing like right beside me. I noticed he had this nice wrist watch which had a compass and all kinds of gadgets on it and I complimented him on it. Then we started talking and we just clicked. We didn't even belong to the same class then but we became good friends. The following year they put all the guys who got good grades together so we were in the same class from then on and we got really close."

When he entered high school, Jojo was placed in the sixth section out of ten but, true to his competitive nature, he soon worked his way into the top section. Many of the other students who attained this level have gone on to become key leaders in the Philippines. Truth be told, had they been in America this group would have been called the class of nerds. With little contact with the members of the opposite sex, the brighter boys focused on their studies.

"In those days I was much skinnier and perhaps considered not very attractive," Jojo said. "In the Philippines the standard for a good looking boy includes being lighter skinned and having features which are almost Hispanic or mestizo (Filipino-Hispanic). I didn't have any of those so I was considered like a mutt. To top it off I had a very small weekly allowance and no money for dating."

Sayson was a model student and rarely got into trouble. "I don't remember him being in trouble." John Talabis recalled. "We would make rubber band slingshots on our fingers and shoot paper wads. We'd try to hit people in the back of the head and then we'd go about our work like we didn't do anything. The school principal would come by and we would pretend like nothing had

happened, but we got caught a couple of times and got in a bit trouble. We were more pranksters than serious troublemakers.”

“Jojo was a very good boy,” his mother agreed. “He never gave me trouble during his school days. Every year in elementary they would give recognition medals to Jojo. He was awarded Boy Scout of the year two times. He would always be recognized for his achievements.”

Rosalina “Sally” Sioson also went to high school with Jojo. “At our school the boys and girls were separated – the boys went to the afternoon classes and girls were in the morning ones,” she remembers. “But there were some activities with girls and boys together and I met Jojo at one of those. What I remember about him was that he was very outgoing and very friendly, even back then. We both lived in a very modest suburban community in Manila not too far away from each other, and he and a friend would ride their bicycles over to my house just to chat.”

“But my family was very conservative and girls were not supposed to go out of the house and talk to boys on the streets. So Jojo and his friend would circle around the house and I would be peeking out the window. He would call me on the phone and we would talk that way. He has always been a really good friend. There was nothing really romantic between us – he was almost like a brother to me.”

Rosalina remembered their high school conversations: “Most of the time what we talked about back then was about other girls. He had a crush on one of my dearest friends and we’d talk about her. It was all very innocent compared to what 16 or 17 year old kids are doing now.”

“Jojo used to clean out the jeepneys [rickety twelve seat converted WWII jeep design which are still used throughout the country] that served as the public transportation system in the Philippines, so he could buy presents for his friends. He was that humble. He would not try to hide it - he would say it as it

is. He was proud to do that so he could buy presents. He would talk about what presents he was going to buy his friends or his family for hours on the phone - what color pen, what brand, all that youthful stuff. He always just told it to you as it was - no pretenses, even today.”

John Talabis described the social scene in those days. “We had a lot of parties in high school and my mom had a car. You can drive a lot younger in the Philippines. I learned to drive when I was about 14 and when there were parties I borrowed the car, a Mitsubishi hatchback, and picked him up. We did a lot of double dating. We would come home late like maybe 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. I would just take Jojo home with me and in the morning my mom would make us breakfast. He knew my brother and sisters too.”

But even then, Jojo Sayson was contributing time to help other people. “Jojo has always been a very giving person,” Talabis said. “When we were in high school, he was part of a group called SCA (Student Catholic Action) and on Sundays they would go out to work with the poor children of Manila and talk to them about God. He really cared about them. Jojo is like a big brother to me. I look up to him. I see a spiritual strength in him and, even today when I feel down, he encourages me.”

It was in high school as well that Sayson’s interest in music and performance grew: “At one point I noticed one of my friends playing piano,” Sayson recalled. “He was able to play modern music just by knowing a few chords, so he showed me some things and I realized that I knew a lot of it from my classical piano training. I started playing that kind of music and soon I could compose my own music. I composed some soft rock songs, but I didn’t have any recording equipment.”

“We always tried to help Jojo achieve his dreams,” his mother, Elvina recalled. “When Jojo was in his first year of high school my husband and I bought a car just so we could bring Jojo

back and forth to school. That was our first car. Then we bought him a piano, a white piano so he could practice for his recitals.” John Talabis remembered Jojo as being very active. “He was involved with a lot of catholic youth organizations, he did the drawings for the school bulletin and he sang for performances and in competitions. He was always kind of the leader.”

Performing was another thing that he and Sally Sioson had in common. “Jojo dances, he sings and he loves the arts. He was popular for the dances that he did back in high school. We had lots of singing competitions and we were together in those competitions and we would compete with freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors all through high school. There were lots of programs - not a lot of plays, but a lot of programs. If the math club had some sort of a competition there would be intermissions with song and dance numbers. We did that for a lot of clubs like the photography club. Jojo was always very into photography as well.”

In high school Sayson played several sports but it was in soccer that he was a standout. In college, at the young age of seventeen, he became the youngest member of the University of Santo Tomas College of Medicine & Surgery soccer team, playing the sweeper or fullback position.

In the Philippines, all high school age boys are required to take Citizens Army Training (CAT), which generally means that in their junior and senior years they spend Saturdays training on the university campus. In college, everyone goes into ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Course). After training is completed they participate in public events, marching and drilling wearing military uniforms and carrying wooden guns. Although he was a high academic achiever and clearly one of the brighter students, who was on the fast track for success, it was during an ROTC function that Jojo Sayson performed an act that gave the greatest indication of the person he was to become.

When Pope John Paul II visited the Philippines in 1981 the ROTC assisted with crowd control in Manila. Sixteen-year-old Sayson was a Master Sergeant in the CAT & ROTC Military Police Company, and his unit was stationed outside the entrance to the Grandstand before which the Pope would hold mass. Thousands of increasingly-excited people were yelling “Totus Tuus!” (John Paul II’s apostolic motto meaning ‘totally yours’) feverishly as the Holy Father’s car, with its top open so he could wave, entered the area, so the military-student cadets locked arms to provide a barrier between him and the multitude.

The sea of humanity began pressing and pushing at the gates trying to break through. Sayson looked up to see a woman holding her infant child who were being pushed down onto the pavement by the pressing crowd. He realized that a human stampede was imminent and instructed the cadets under his command to push ahead against the crowd in time for Jojo to grab the woman and her baby and pull them free. It was one of the first times Sayson felt God leading him to do something specific. “I knew that if I did not pull her out she and the baby would die. I knew we were not going to be able to hold the gates, and that I was supposed to save her instead.”

The throng indeed surged through the gates and when his instincts proved right Sayson realized that God had chosen him to be in that exact spot for that exact purpose. It was a humbling experience but one that he instinctively knew would happen again and again throughout his life.

As soon as he graduated from high school Sayson began college at the University of Santo Tomas. At the time his goal was to become a surgeon and he initially studied physical therapy as a pre-med course. There were other routes he could have taken to get his Bachelor of Science Degree, including studying zoology and psychology. “I guess I was attracted by

the term ‘physical therapy’ because I was fascinated by the inner workings and the mechanics of the human body.”

While at the university Sayson began to work more on his own body, joining Stan Carbungco’s Gym and working out regularly. Stan Carbungco was a legendary Filipino bodybuilder who was Mr. Philippines in 1959 and the first representative from the islands to compete in the Mr. Universe Competition in Montreal. Bodybuilding in the Philippines was somewhat of a rarity back then. Filipinos are generally smaller than Westerners and Filipino food, while tasty, is not very healthy because it’s loaded with carbohydrates, sugars and fats. “Stan taught me the basics of bodybuilding,” Jojo said, “and I became very disciplined with it and started growing my muscles.”

So it was that another aspect of Jojo Sayson, the seed of physical appearance and strength, began to grow. Perhaps even more influential on Sayson at the time were two new friends that he met at the gym. Norman Reyes and Bing Pabalan were both professors at Ateneo de Manila University and like Jojo had a strong love for adventure and philosophy. “We became great friends,” Jojo recalled warmly. “We did a lot of hiking and traveling together, going to the mountains and into the rainforests. We went to an island called Mindoro to collect specimens for their biology and science classes. We skin dived out to the coral reefs. Both of these men were very philosophical and whenever we were together we would discuss philosophy and religion. Also, they both loved classical music. I had loved classical music as a child. It always reminded me of grand places that I associated with heaven. The three of us would always listen to Mozart and Tchaikovsky on our Sonny Walkmans. Norman and Bing were both a big influence on me, especially in developing my philosophical side.”

While Jojo is in contact with Norman to this day, he and Bing had a falling out because of Sayson’s spiritual views. “He was a great friend, but then he told me he didn’t want to talk to

me anymore because I spoke about God so much and he no longer believed.”

It wouldn't be the last time that Sayson would lose a friend because of his spiritual beliefs. Whenever someone takes a stand about anything it is likely that some of the people around him or her will disagree with that stand and pull away. When the commitment is of a spiritual nature the rejection is even more dramatic.

During college Sayson also expanded his involvement with the arts. There were drama (stage play) competitions in the College of Medicine and Surgery and he was asked to complete a song for the drama club. “They gave me some lyrics and I composed some music for them. Later, a small choir sang the song and it won the best music award. Then my younger sister, Jeraldine, wanted me to teach her how to sing. I did and, as an adult she became a very famous platinum selling recording artist in the Philippines. I'm very proud of her and that I was involved somehow in starting her dreams when she was little. I did a lot of dancing when I was growing up as well. It has always been easy for me to mimic something whether it was singing like someone on a record or picking up dance steps. I always wanted to do tap dancing as a young boy but there were no opportunities or classes I could attend. Sometimes I think that music was another pathway I could have gotten into, but it didn't seem like the route for me to really make a living. As children we were kind of conditioned that we must have a college degree and a job.”

At the University of Santo Tomas, physical therapy was taught under the College of Medicine and Surgery. It was Jojo's plan to continue on in that college to become a doctor, and then move to America. But in 1983, before he graduated, his father took a job as an engineer in an aluminum factory in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia because the sales at the grocery store had not been enough to support the family. For six years, Alfredo Sayson worked at

the factory for ten months out of the year and spent two months at home with his family. This kind of thing is not unusual in the Philippines where fathers will often work overseas to support their families back in the islands. Alfredo wanted Jojo to be able to go to medical school, but that would have meant another four or five years at the aluminum factory, seeing his family only two months out of the year. So Jojo decided to forego his dream of becoming a medical doctor, get his degree in Physical Therapy, and go to work in America so the family could be restored.

While he was an intern at the charity division of the University of Santo Tomas Hospital, Sayson received a confirmation that he had made the right choice. The standard of care at the private pay section of the hospital was much higher than the charity division which had to rely a great deal on interns. "We were supervised by real doctors, but we did most of the work," Jojo related. "The charity division was pretty grungy compared to American standards. I worked in the Physical Therapy department, which was poorly lit and right next to the morgue in the hospital basement. I remember sitting there studying my anatomy book when the technicians wheeled in a paraplegic who was paralyzed from his chest and down. They placed wooden planks behind his knees and wrapped them with some worn-out elastic bandages, and with the catheter and all he tried to stand. He was dragging himself and the technician was behind him with a little belt to make sure he didn't fall."

I saw the determination of this man. I knew there was nothing that he could really do. The purpose of him standing was physiologic loading -- just a way to get his bones to bear some kind of weight. But, I saw hope in his face that one day he would walk. He was dragging his legs and his pants fell to his knees and he was still trying to walk. It was embarrassing because he had a catheter and he was now naked, but he didn't realize it because he couldn't feel and he was still trying. I looked at that man and

asked myself do I want to be behind a desk writing a prescription as the doctor or do I want to be in the trenches and help men like that to walk? It was like a revelation. I knew then that I wanted to work as a physical therapist.”

This story also illustrates a characteristic of the Philippine culture: the people would try to present a positive view of life, even when they are suffering. “They have the ability to smile even when they are feeling despair,” Sayson noted. “You can even see it in the newscasts. There were disastrous floods there not too long ago and a lot of people lost their lives. They showed films of people walking in mud and water up to their necks while they were carrying their belongings, and when the cameras were on them they were all smiling. How can someone in the midst of such a disaster smile? But it dampens the despair. I’ve met many people in the Philippines who, even in the face of despair and adversity, even if tears are running from their eyes, they still try to smile.”

John Talabis also chose to become a physical therapist which meant that he and Jojo attended classes together. Schoolwork was hard but there were also a few lighthearted moments. “Jojo is a lot of fun,” Talabis said. “Sometimes he would play pranks and turn a dull situation into something that was fun for everyone; he was very well-liked. Once we were in our third year of college and it was the first time that we were supposed to work with cadavers...We were just going to go up to the morgue and dissect them as part of our anatomy class. We were just finishing class and everyone was heading to the morgue for the dissections and Jojo grabbed me and said, ‘Come with me. Let’s play a joke.’ So we raced up the stairs so we would get to the morgue before everyone else did. It was this huge room with something like fifty dead bodies lying out on gurneys.”

“So Jojo goes in and finds an empty gurney and he takes off his shirt and lays down on it. I found a place to hide so I could

watch as the class entered the room. Now most of the people in our class were girls, and when they came into the morgue they of course started fussing about all the dead bodies and one girl said, 'Oh look, there's even a fresh one' and several of them walked over to where Jojo was lying. He waited until he could hear them coming over by him and then he jumped up and grabbed out for them. There was nothing but screaming and running. It was hilarious!"

This was not to say that Sayson didn't focus on his studies. "Even then, Jojo liked a challenge," Talabis recalled. "You could just tell. Even when we were faced with lots of tests and had to do a great amount of studying he would just study and not even complain. He always had a very positive attitude."

Talabis also remembered Sayson talking about wanting to be an astronaut. "He expressed that even then. He would talk a lot about science and outer space and wanting to become part of that."

Though they attended separate colleges, Jojo and his friend Sally Sioson stayed in touch. "I went to the University of the Philippines and we were a ways away from each other so we did not have as much contact," Sally remembered. "He and I were both sort of nerdy in that we loved to study. We were brought up to put really great importance in our education. That was our main goal in life: to study and finish college and to make something out of ourselves. That was our dream. You partied only if it was not in the way of anything with school."

"I was taking up Hotel & Restaurant Administration at the University of the Philippines and Jojo was at the University of Santo Tomas. My sister is a year older than Jojo and she took the same course as he did and saw him a lot at school. What I remember about college was when I turned 18 I had a debutante party. In America young girls have a Sweet-Sixteen

party but in the Philippines we celebrate it at eighteen. Maybe we're two years behind the American girls in maturing. So I invited Jojo to my debutante party and it was 1980 and he danced just like John Travolta. I have a video of that – he was amazing.”

One of the things people often mention about Jojo Sayson is his loyalty as a friend. Sally Sioson agreed: “Even after I moved to a different house, Jojo would take the public transportation all that way to visit me because friendship is important to him. He would bring his camera and take shots of me and we'd just talk. You know when he's a friend of yours he's a friend forever. He has close to three thousand friends on Facebook and I believe he gives quality time to each of them. How he does it, I don't know, but it's because he is sincere. Even just one encounter with him would have meaning to the person.”

It was around this time that Sayson had another one of his supernatural dreams. In this one he dreamed of a similar presence to the man in the white robe that he had dreamed of as a child. “I was in the white place again. The man in the white robe was not there, but there was a divine presence whom I believe was God. This time there was conversation and I asked, ‘God is there a Heaven?’ And then there was this soothing voice which to me is what the voice of God would be like and He said ‘Yes, there is a Heaven.’ I then asked him, ‘What is a Heaven?’ and He answered ‘Heaven is when there is a difference in fabrication’ and the scene faded away.”

The following year most of Sayson's graduating class would have to take an examination to be admitted to the medical school, but since his grades were high enough to put him in the top five of his class, he was exempted. But he had already made his decision. “The Institute of Physical Therapy Director, Dr. Tyrone Reyes, told me that I would be guaranteed acceptance to medical school but I told him, ‘thank you very much, but I'm going to

America.' I told my Dad I was going to America and that he didn't have to keep working at the aluminum factory and not see our family. I could work in America because I had the education and training as a physical therapist, a profession in short supply in the USA during that time."

"There is just no comparison to what Americans earn. When I was working as a therapist in the Philippines back in 1985-86, I was earning the equivalent of sixty U.S. dollars a month and I was the Chief Physical Therapist. That wasn't even enough to pay my own rent so I was still living with my folks. I knew if I came to America I would make more money, be able to help my family and have even more educational opportunities. And, in America, I could meet the authors of all these books I was reading."

At that time in The United States there was a shortage of physical therapists, so foreign-based ones were admitted. To obtain their American visa a Filipino physical therapist needed an H1-B contract, confirming they had already secured a position in The States. As did many emigrants from his country, Sayson could have worked through a recruiting agency, which would have obtained the contract, arranged all the paperwork - and collected a hefty finder's fee.

On his own, Jojo sent applications to various American hospitals. "Some of them were handwritten and some were typed," he recalls as the internet was not available yet, "but all those hospitals I wrote to were picked at random. Their names were just given to me by a neighbor because we didn't have computers back then."

Elvina Sayson remembered that time. "Jojo graduated with honors at the University of Santo Tomas. In those days his dad was working in Saudi Arabia and he came home for Jojo's graduation. Jojo had already been accepted into medical school, but he knew if he worked in the physical therapy profession he

could start working right away and the money would really help the family. We had a friend in the Philippines whose wife was working in the United States and she told him that they needed a physical therapist so he recommended Jojo.”

To come to America to work in those days a Filipino had to have an H1-B work visa from the US Embassy. There was an immigration quota that allowed foreign based physical therapists because there was a shortage of them in America at that time. To do this required Sayson to go through a recruiting agency. The agency arranges all the paperwork, obtains the employment contract and gets a hefty finder’s fee. I chose two states to apply to, Texas and Florida. I chose them because their average temperatures were similar to that of the Philippines so I wouldn’t freeze myself. I sent out around twenty applications and a hospital in Texas responded through an agency. It took an entire year to arrange the papers.”

Now that Jojo knew he was going to America for certain he thought long and hard about what to expect. “Everyone in The Philippines held America in such high regard,” he recalled. “There is a Filipino mindset called ‘colonial mentality’ that anything Western must be better. That is why a lighter skin is considered more beautiful than a darker skin. If you were from America you were thought of as being rich and important. Any product that came from there had to be better and anyone going to live there had to be a big shot.”

“This colonial mentality is ridiculous and I wanted to think that my reasons for going abroad were beyond that, but since I had dreamed of coming to America ever since I was a little kid, I knew that all those misconceptions played into my reasoning to a degree. The thing about a goal or a dream is that often when you attain it you find it is different than what you expected. But still, the fact that you did attain it counts for so much that you can grow past your false expectations and embrace the reality with a sense of victory.”

Jojo's dream started before he was born, with the longings of his mother gazing at the airplanes high in the sky as she toiled in the rice fields and prayed for a better life for herself and her family-to-be. It continued with the boy Jojo holding a flashlight and tracing the path from The Philippines to America on his globe, and reading his Superman and Batman comics and yearning to become a superhero.

And when that boy, now age 21, left The Islands on a Pan American 747 jumbo jet it was the first time he flew in an airplane. He remembered it clearly: "When it took off into the clouds the first thing that came into my mind was that this is what the view is like if you were in a space ship, or flying like Superman."

So on January 25, 1986, Joselito "Jojo" Sayson arrived in the United States. He had borrowed \$800 from his father for the trip. The Pan Am ticket cost him \$600, so he had \$200 left. But on his stopover in Japan he missed his family so much that he bought his little sister Jeraldine a \$30 radio, so when he set foot on American soil he had \$170 to his name - not a great deal of money, even in 1986.

But he was in America. Jojo Sayson had made another dream come true. Now, more than ever before, he knew his dreams could come true if he worked hard enough and long enough. And now, a lifetime of dreams were before him.

8

Part Two

Arriving in America

Chapter Three

An Immigrant

“God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage.”
- Anonymous

Like many immigrants, when Sayson arrived in America he soon realized that most of his preconceptions of the country were based on movies. Nonetheless, this still was the land of opportunity, the place where one could turn their dreams into reality. “Everything smelled new and was nicer looking – the roads, the buildings. The people were wearing more expensive clothes compared to what people wore in the Philippines. Part of it was like a magic kingdom.”

But there was also the harsh truth of arriving in San Francisco with only \$170 and he experienced quite a few culture shocks. There were many things which confused him, starting in the men’s room with faucets which had no handles. “Here I was with my hands soaped up and, when I went to the sink, there were no handles and I had no clue how to get the water to come out. I had never seen a faucet that was operated by a sensor. I saw the other men rub their hands in the sink and the water came out for them. I think mine was broken because I rubbed and rubbed and nothing came out, but I felt like I’d come from the dark ages. I was a little embarrassed so I pretended nothing was wrong and I just got paper towels and wiped my hands and walked away.”

There are many such small aspects of everyday life that Americans take for granted but which can be very confusing to someone from out of the country. For Jojo Sayson it became a process of biding his time, staying aware, and learning as much as

he could as he experienced this new world. From San Francisco he flew to Houston Hobby Airport in Houston, Texas where he was picked up by people from the agency that had arranged his employment. He stayed with their family for a few days until he could meet with his new employer. Then he was flown by private Cessna airplane to Breckenridge, Texas, about two hours from Dallas. "I was dropped off at the hospital where I was to work, but I had no place to stay. This was very different for me because in the Philippine culture, when you have guests you really cater to them, making sure they have food and a place to sleep, but here I was on my own."

He was then introduced to the people he was going to work with, shown his office in the hospital's department of physical therapy, and then his boss said goodbye and went back to Houston. "So here I was with my two suitcases and \$170. I found out later that the Filipino placement agency who arranged for all my travel and employment documents had taken the \$600 startup and moving expense money allocated by my American employer and kept it. So instead of helping a fellow Filipino these people were making extra money off immigrants because of our ignorance and because we were humble and happy to have a job. When I told the agency I didn't have any money to put down for an apartment, they said they could loan me \$600 and I could pay it back a little bit each month."

The same dynamics was involved in salary negotiations. The immigrants usually agreed to whatever was first offered to them because they were grateful to have a job and the money was much better than what they were used to. "Of course, eventually I found out I was the lowest paid for my job because I didn't negotiate. We immigrants had the idea that these people knew our capabilities and talents and would be fair with us, and I found out the hard way that it wasn't like that. If you are subservient in America you are seen as weak whereas if you are subservient

in the Orient, like ours in the Philippines, you are rewarded for being a loyal employee. They were giving the immigrants the far flung contracts that no American therapist wanted. The typical American graduate is able to demand things like where they want to work and what kind of perks and benefits they want. The immigrants don't do that, especially at first. Eventually they start changing but that is not always good either, because you have these pure-minded people becoming selfish, actually more immature and at times inconsiderate. To many Filipinos, they describe this as being westernized."

For his first three days on the job Sayson had no place of his own to live. It was then he really began learning about the other side of small town American culture. The hospital volunteers, called the "pink ladies" found out he had nowhere to stay and no supplies and they all pitched in. "One day this lady came to the clinic and brought me a paper bag with a blanket, a pillow, silverware, plates, glasses and cups in it. She said it was things they didn't use at home and they wanted me to have them. I still have some of them because, even though they were all mismatched, they were a present and I was so thankful they were kind enough to come and help me. The kind administrator of the hospital, Mr. Ballew, heard that I didn't have a place to stay so he let me sleep in the hospital in one of the empty patient rooms. The hospital gave me patient food for my dinner and I was able to sleep and shower there until I was able to get an apartment. That's when I understood that it's small town America where the real America is. It's there that you have people helping out each other and I was starting to feel at home."

After a few days Sayson was able to get a furnished one-bedroom apartment for \$150 a month. His aunt Estrella, Alfredo's youngest sister who lived in Virginia, sent him pots and pans and such and would call just to make sure he was okay. Not surprisingly for someone eager to learn American culture, the first

thing Jojo bought for himself was a television. "I got one at a local store and a new friend of mine, Jeff Rodgers co-signed for the payment plan so I was able to pay for it on a monthly basis."

The hospital was small, with only a fifty-bed capacity, and there were many things about it that were not what Sayson had expected from all his years dreaming about America. "I think the average age of a nurse there was about 60 years old. My idea of an American hospital was from the movies so I thought all the nurses would look like Pamela Anderson. I was kind of disappointed that they were all like my grandma. When my friends wrote me letters from the Philippines they would say things like 'I'll bet you're having a great time with all those nurses there' and I'd think, 'yeah, if I'm a good boy, maybe they'll bake me some cookies.'"

Although times were not easy, in his typical positive fashion, Jojo Sayson viewed his new life as an adventure. Knowledge excites him and he was learning so much. Besides his work he was also preparing to take the Texas State Board examination to obtain his physical therapy license in Texas, so on the weekends he would study. He had brought two suitcases to America -- one with clothes and the other filled with books. "I took my examination sometime in June and I passed it! My scores were above the national average scores so I was pleased." But he didn't stop there. One of the things that had drawn Sayson to America was the tremendous amount of knowledge that is available. He started attending continuing education seminars. "I was very thrilled because this was what I had envisioned. I had thought that if I came to America then I would have the opportunity to learn new ideas and go beyond the books I had been reading. I was always excited."

But some of the things Sayson was learning disappointed him. Many of his fellow therapists had a condescending attitude when dealing with foreign graduates like him - a false confidence

of clinical competence with lack of genuine concern for their patients. “It turned me off to see therapists do that and from then on I decided I was going to study the advances in physical therapy like no one else and when I had that knowledge I would use it to help people, not puff myself up. I will advance myself but when I get there I will have compassion and I will help.”

Sayson also became increasingly aware of the subtle discrimination against the immigrant workers. In the Philippines an employee is taught not to complain but to bear his load with a smile. The only acceptable form of protest is being overly silent with the presumption that the employer will pick up on that silence and do something about the situation.

But this is not the way it is done in America. “I found out that being quiet was considered a sign of weakness and that some people will take advantage of that. I was willing to give the shirt off my back and drop anything I was doing if someone asked for my help because, in the culture I was raised in, when someone does something good for you, you appreciate it and reciprocate but that is not how some American workers think here. Here they think you are weak if you allow someone to take advantage and don’t complain.”

One of the worst culture shocks for Sayson involved the first time he was asked to do some outpatient therapy at a local Breckenridge nursing home. “I didn’t know what a nursing home was. Was it a house for nurses or a place for mothers to nurse babies? The homes for the aged in the Philippines are for people who have no families and are homeless. In the Philippines, the children are expected to take care of their parents until they pass on. When I went to my first Texas nursing home, I was shocked. The smell of urine, feces, and uncleanness was everywhere because it was not really well kept.”

“I saw all these depressed elderly people slumped in their wheelchairs in the hallway with very few visitors and I

was told that this was a place for the elderly of American society. I couldn't believe it. In America do they dump their old people in these facilities because they don't want them anymore? There was a little bit of anger in me and then I thought that maybe the fault lies in the elderly themselves, that perhaps because when they were young they failed to connect with their children because they didn't spend time with them. I wanted to give some cheer to those people so I went to the piano and I started playing and they slowly gathered around with a smile and I just talked to them. I'm not a great pianist but I can play a little bit, and it was enough to make a difference."

Jojo Sayson has always been as interested in human relationships as well as technical knowledge, and a therapist needs both. "By the time I'd been in America six months, I was very well accepted. I guess that one thing that people liked about me was that I was always very friendly but that too is part of the Philippine culture."

At 22, Sayson, knew how to connect with people and often indulged in his comedic side to break down barriers and make friendships. One of the good friends he made at the time was a patient named Jeff Rodgers, an all American Texan, who took Sayson under his wing and introduced him to many of the warmer aspects of American culture. "He took me places in his pick-up truck and brought me to his home to meet his family. I was always invited there for Christmas and holidays. He made me feel welcome. Since August, 1986 when I met him I have been calling him on his birthday and he always gets surprised. I taught him how to work-out a little bit and we have little pet names for each other. He calls me Schwartz, derived from Schwarzenegger, and I call him Jefferigno, from Lou Ferrigno. He was a success story on his own. He didn't have a college degree but ended up having his own successful tank trucking business transporting salt water for the oil fields."

Another humorous moment was the first time Jojo saw snow. There were flurries in Breckenridge and when he saw it, he ran outside and started jumping around in the parking lot. He smiled: "I didn't realize all the other employees were by the window having a blast watching me running around in the snow." After six months Sayson's contract at Breckenridge ended and he became a sort of traveling therapist, working in Dallas, Fort Worth, Kingsville, and finally to Alpine, located between El Paso and Midland-Odessa, close to the Mexican border. He bought his first car, a 1968 Ford Galaxy, from a junk yard for \$400. "I didn't know anything about speed limits. I would drive like 90 miles an hour on open roads because I didn't know what the speed limit was (it was 55 mph then)."

By 1987, Sayson had worked in several different hospitals in the Lone Star State of Texas and in the remote mountain city of Alpine he was the only physical therapist within a radius of 200 miles. This meant that he performed all aspects of the job – home-health care, other hospitals, and nursing homes. He also settled into the American culture and even began dating. "During my high school and college days I never really had a girlfriend," he said. "I was there in school to learn and I had a mission to get good grades. Also, though I really liked girls I felt like I was somewhat of an ugly duckling. I had female friends but no one really seemed to want to date me. When I came to America I suddenly realized that I was considered exotic. So my social life became better and I began taking girls to movies and places. I realized that I wasn't that bad looking after all to Westerners and my confidence grew."

It was also in Alpine where Sayson's link with nature began to reaffirm itself. It was far away from just about everything and its rugged desert-meets-mountain beauty appealed strongly to him. "That was the place where they filmed the first Marlboro commercial," he related. "That was thrilling to me because as a

child I would see this commercial with a cowboy on the horse in the middle of this wondrous country.”

Always one to enhance an experience, Jojo went out and bought himself a cowboy hat, boots, tight jeans, a big belt buckle, a plaid shirt and a six-shooter. “I had a Smith and Wesson .44 magnum special and I carried it with me all the time because in Texas you can purchase a gun with a driver’s license but you have to carry it where people can see it. The gun wasn’t just for show though. If you break down out there you can run into coyotes and lots of wild animals. And there is a lot of dangerous drug smuggling going on there across the US-Mexican border.”

By now the junk yard 1968 Ford Galaxy was on its last legs so Sayson bought his boss’s pickup truck, a 1976 red Silverado. In keeping with his belief that envisioning a goal helps it become reality, Sayson’s new second-hand vehicle was right out of his childhood fantasies: “I used to play with this little red plastic truck on the bed and use my rumpled blankets and pillows as mountains, and now here I was driving a red pickup truck through the mountains around Alpine, Texas.”

So here’s this Filipino therapist in cowboy gear driving around Marlboro country in his red pickup truck – just exactly how he’d seen himself when at ten years old he pointed at America on the globe in his room.

Taking full advantage of the beautiful country, Sayson also did a lot of hiking and mountaineering around Alpine. While there are mountains in the Philippines they are far away from Manila and, in the poverty of his youth, Jojo rarely had the resources to travel. But in Alpine everything was within driving distance. “I’m not a trained climber,” he said. “but I’m not afraid of heights. I rock climb. I don’t use ropes but I try to be a calculated climber. If there is a pathway you take it and if not, you make your own. It is quite exhilarating to be on top of a mountain, but sometimes you get into trouble. I’ve been stuck in

crevices and wondered how I was going to get out. Looking back I realized I could have died because nobody knew where I was. But I really enjoy the solace of the outdoors. In some ways this is where you find God.”

Sayson became friends with Clem, a Filipino man who was a US Border Patrol guard and often went practice-shooting with the guards. Though an immigrant, he quickly bonded with the men. “I had to come here the hard way, the legal way, and I don’t feel a person should break the law.”

Clem even gave him a cap embroidered with “U.S. Border Patrol” and he wore it whenever he went handgun shooting. “I noticed a lot of the Hispanic migrant workers would shy away from me and I thought maybe it was because of my gun but then I realized it was because I was wearing that Border Patrol cap.”

Anyone who knows Jojo Sayson, knows that he has a special relationship with children. In the Philippines he has helped fund an institution for children with cancer*, and both there and in the United States, he frequently visits children’s hospitals dressed as Superman or Batman, sometimes virtually adopting kids in need of special care. In some ways, all this wonderful work began in Alpine, Texas. “In Alpine I started to realize that I have sort of a unique way with children. I still have a childlike sense of having fun – playing – and they pick up on that.”

“I began coaching a little league soccer team there and I realized the kids really liked my company and that I could teach them. I would call it a blessing.” Alpine was also where Sayson fulfilled another childhood dream; learning to fly an airplane. His instructor, Captain George Vose, was a World War II fighter pilot instructor, but before Sayson could finish the program and get his pilot’s license he was to move again. This time to Illinois.

* C.H.I.L.D. Haus, established by Philippine celebrity Ricky Reyes and supported by the University of Santo Tomas High School Batch 1980 Alumni Association.

Chapter Four

The Heartland

“Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and
thou hast strengthened the feeble knees.”

- Job 4:4 (KJV)

In January of 1989, Jojo Sayson signed a new contract for his services that brought him to Kankakee, Illinois, about 60 miles south of Chicago. His primary motive for moving was to be situated in a place where he could not only advance professionally, but learn more about his chosen field. The recruiting firm that had brought him to Texas had just secured their first out-of-state placement, and Sayson was offered the position. “Part of the reason they asked me first,” he explained, “was that immigrants like myself tended not to complain when they were sent somewhere else because they had been taught to first be loyal to their employers. Someone who had just graduated Stateside might be choosier than a newly arrived immigrant because we don’t know any better and we’re not tied down with property and family. Even though I’d been in America for a while, still everything I owned was easily packed in my red pick-up truck.”

Well, not quite. By now, Sayson was developing American purchasing habits and his personal property had grown enough to require a U-Haul trailer hitched to the back of his truck. The trip itself was quite an adventure and included his first traffic accident when he encountered a blizzard, at night just outside of Texarkana, Texas. “I drove past Dallas and Fort Worth wearing my cowboy hat and listening to the boom box in my truck. I had never been in a blizzard and, when I got to Texarkana, there was

ice covering the highway. My trailer jack-knifed and carried my pick-up sideways on the inter-state highway. I crashed into the median and there was a dip and then I was headed right for a 50 foot electric pole.”

“I had some fear, but I was so excited I felt like Luke Skywalker in Star Wars movie crashing his X-wing fighter into the snow when his ship was blasted from the sky by the giant AT-AT mechanical snow-walkers. I smashed into that pole and there were sparks coming down and some smoke. Then I heard this creaking sound and the pole started falling. It fell right across the other side of the highway.”

“I realized it was a hazard so I got out of the vehicle and went to center of the interstate waving this dinky flashlight around to warn incoming vehicles. Two cars appeared and when the drivers tried to stop they started sliding and it was like a movie. I felt like I was moving in slow motion as I jumped over the pole into the snow and rolled so the cars wouldn’t hit me. Both cars hit the pole, but no one was hurt. One man had just had his car fixed and he was pretty upset but the other guy was more civilized. We stayed in the same motel and I bought them breakfast the next day. I had to get a different trailer, and everything had gotten smashed except amazingly, my aquarium.”

Sayson soon arrived in Kankakee, Illinois and went to work at Provena St. Mary’s Hospital. He stayed first in a Day’s Inn but, much wiser now than when he’d first arrived in America, he’d already arranged for the recruiter to cover his transitional housing and soon rented a little apartment in nearby Bourbonnais. But he was still considered a traveling therapist which meant that he could again be recalled or reassigned. When the contract was not renewed Sayson decided to resign from the employment service. He’d already proven his considerable skills and knew now that he could get work on his own. “I decided I didn’t want to travel any more. I wanted to put roots down so I could have a family.”

Shortly after this, Jojo joined forces with an orthopedic surgeon who had set up an out-patient clinic in the Kankakee area. While there, he met his first wife, who was a patient at the clinic. "She was a beautiful blonde, green-eyed gal," he recalled. "She was 18 at the time and I was 27. I married her in a church wedding in the Philippines. I married her there because before I left Alpine my dad had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. When I planned a trip to the Philippines it was to visit him, but my fiancée was diagnosed with bi-polar depression and she was jealous and worried that I would hook up with an old flame so I suggested we get married there. I married her in a church so my father could see me get married that way, but I think those circumstances sort of pushed me into making too quick of a decision."

Sally Sioson recalls the wedding. "After college I worked in catering for different hotels in the Philippines and Jojo moved to the United States. Now we're even farther away from each other and very busy with our lives. I pretty much didn't know what was going on with him until I found out he was getting married and I was invited to his wedding in the Philippines. I never got to meet her until the day of the wedding. I came to the wedding with one of the boys from our batch (high school class) and I think we were the only two high school friends who were there at his wedding. That meant a lot to me. We hardly had time to talk of course, because there were so many guests, but knowing him as well as I did, I didn't see happiness in his face. He was just going through the process, but I didn't say anything about it. And the next thing you know he was divorced from the lady and I didn't know why or when that part I did not ask him."

The marriage lasted only nine months. Sayson's wife announced she was seeing another man and was leaving. On top of this his business partnership collapsed at about the same time and Jojo, being as naturally trustful as he is, was taken advantage

of. “Our contract was a handshake, which was fine for me, but I soon learned that I needed to have something in writing. I was promised 50% ownership and 50% of the profit. It was very lucrative. He was a well-known orthopedic surgeon during that time and I was seeing up to fifty patients a day and billing each one between a hundred and two hundred dollars. But I never really got to see much of that money because after a few months my partner mysteriously decided to close the business and leave town.”

“I learned the hard way, but I’ve never lost hope that there were other people I could work with who would be fair. His boss and business partner married his secretary, and I found out later that his first wife committed suicide in the garage using the exhaust from the car. It was a mess of a story so when he left he just announced one day he was closing shop and I couldn’t prove that I had any ownership. I was devastated.”

Jojo Sayson had reached the darkest moment of his life. He’d lost his wife and his job and been cheated out of a great deal of money and his father was dying. Then came word that his grandfather Guillermo (Tatang Memo), his mother’s father, was about to pass away. He needed to be with his family, especially his mother, more than ever. But he was far away and flat broke. With so many of his dreams crushed, Jojo was filled with doubts. Perhaps he’d been wrong about the power of the mind to make dreams come true. Perhaps he’d been wrong about God’s love. “I had nothing,” he relates. “In the Philippines we have an unspoken demand that the oldest child takes care of the family, especially when the father is incapacitated. I had been sending a big portion of my paycheck back home every month for my brother and sister to go to college and to help with the expenses of my father being ill.”

“That was very important to me. In fact, when I married my first wife I told her, ‘I cannot marry you if you are against this.

I am their only hope.’ And now I couldn’t do anything for them. With losing the wife, losing my father, losing my grandfather, and losing my job, I was the lowest of the lowest. I felt like I had been cheated.”

He began to think of the unthinkable...suicide. And so came the hour of the enemy, the devil – the blinder of vision, the defiler of dreams, the blocker of growth, the promise of an easy way out. One night the feelings of hopelessness preyed on Jojo Sayson through the entire night and into the dawn. He could no longer live like this. “I had my .38 caliber revolver under my bed. It was a five-round pistol with solid ball bullets. I was so depressed that I sat on the bed crying. I wanted to end my life.”

“In the middle of that lonely night I sat up on my cold bed, pulled out my .38 and I pointed it right under my chin. I slowly squeezed the trigger. The hammer I could feel was starting to rise up on the gun almost to the point of no return. Then something happened: a clear image came into my mind of a forbidding door and I was reaching for that door. It seemed so real. I saw my hand holding that door knob. And I knew that the door was a door of no return. If I passed through that door, I could not return. I saw myself twisting the door knob. As I was pulling the trigger then I saw an image of my family, my mother, brother, sister, and relatives grieving.”

“I saw them grieving and then I saw a shadow which I knew was the wife meant for me who would never be because I was gone. Then there was the shadow of my child-to-be and I knew I would kill the child if I killed myself. I saw the grief that I would create if I pulled that trigger and went through that door. Then I realized that this was the most selfish and stupid thing in the world. Suicide and depression are nothing but selfish motives so I returned the door to the closed position and I put the gun away. I chose to live.”

“It was a new chapter. It was like my whole life was in front of me. It’s not measured by the clock. It was like I had

started to enter a world where time did not exist. That was why I could have all those images in a single moment. I was at death's doorstep."

Despite all his trouble, Jojo had not lost his connection with God and that was what saved him. The next day he awoke feeling he had changed the course of his life. He began talking to God the way he had when he was young. Talking to Him the way he would talk to a friend – sometimes praising, sometimes complaining, sometimes praying, but always being totally open. The Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart, which many attribute to the Psalmist's candid and unveiled approach to his creator. David hid nothing from God because he knew nothing could be hidden from Him – not his sins, not his fears and not his love.

And so, the enemy defeated, Jojo Sayson began his life anew. "I was still going through a divorce," he related thoughtfully, "and the money problems were still there but my attitude had changed. After this I felt more of a relationship with God, things that I couldn't even explain because it is beyond what we can understand. We often perceive our circumstances based on emotions, but you have to take a leap of faith. There's a reason for painful events, to shape and refine you. It's the path to wisdom. The silversmith has to heat silver several times to get the muck out of it and make it pure."

"I was still struggling but it was better. Then one day I physically knelt down and I said 'I surrender. Make me an instrument, Lord. Grant me the wisdom of Solomon and I shall exalt thy name with every opportunity I have.' That is what I asked."

He began to look at life through a different lens – no longer focusing on what he wanted as much as on what God might want for him. He had been demanding with God to bring his wife back. But now he saw things from a new perspective and

he wanted not what alleviated his fears or satisfied his immediate needs, but what was best in the long run.

Then, the day before their divorce was to be finalized, his wife returned. “Before, I had been telling God that I would do anything to get her back, but when that didn’t work out and I felt the course of my life had changed I asked myself, do I want to live with this woman? Could I trust this woman and deal with her jealousy and her rage? Do I want to live like this for the rest of my life?”

“Then she came home and I thought well, I’m getting what I asked God for but is it the right thing? So I asked her, ‘What’s going to happen to us? She said, ‘Well, I’m going to change and you’re going to change.’ And right away it was back to a control issue and I knew it was wrong. I saw in my mind that this was not the way to live life. So I sent her away and she saw that I was a different person.”

Anyone who has been through a divorce knows the huge amount of emotional baggage that remains, pulling like an emotional weight on one’s neck and dragging them down day after day. Returning to one of his great strengths, his ability to visualize, Jojo addressed this issue: “I envisioned myself in this huge balloon basket high in the stratosphere. It was night and there was a storm. The wind was roaring on me in that balloon like a Biblical scene and in that basket were all the painful memories of my failed marriage - my preconceptions, my false hopes, the pain of her infidelity, the agony of failure – all of it.”

“So, in my mind, I held onto the ropes through the lighting and the wind and I had this bowie knife and I cut one rope at a time until the basket was hanging by one rope. In that basket was the load of my whole life and I just cut the last rope and watched all that bad stuff fall into the ocean while I floated free away from the storm.”

‘All well and good, many might say, but the fact remained that Sayson was still broke and without a job. But Sayson believes that the mental process of envisioning provides far more than a

temporary peace of mind (see Chapter 12 for details). He believes it can have a very real effect on reality and in this case it seemed to do just that. “Right after this the vice-president of Provena St. Mary’s Hospital, Mr. Chiyon Lee, called me and offered me a job at their new outpatient clinic in Bourbonnais.”

True to Jojo’s nature he now threw himself into bettering his skills and growing as a human being. He decided to set out to discover who the greatest physical therapist in the world was so he could improve his techniques by studying with them. As has happened so often when he abandons himself to the direction of fate and destiny, in the end he received much more than he bargained for. “I concluded that Ola Grimsby from Norway was the absolute best physical therapist for me,” Jojo said, “and I took a two year course of study with him for what was the Ola Grimsby Institute’s first clinical master’s degree for physical therapists in the State of Illinois. I was in the pioneer class. Every weekend for a four-hour roundtrip drive I traveled all the way to McHenry, Illinois, for classes.”

“I was learning by leaps and bounds – learning new concepts, techniques and ways of thinking that increased my skill in making patients better. I was also drowning my depression and negative thoughts by giving myself over to learning and creative thinking, taking all this negative energy and making it into something positive.”

“I studied for two years in McHenry, Illinois and then I studied another two years in San Diego, California commercially flying back and forth until I became not only a graduate but a qualified Board Examiner. I would fly there one weekend a month for two years. It cost me everything I was making and I’d have to share rooms with classmates there and share a rental car. It was difficult and required a lot of sacrifice but you can’t let obstacles like that stop you. If you concentrate on such obstacles they become bigger and bigger so I just kept on plowing through until

I succeeded. In fact today I'm one of the Board of Directors of the Ola Grimsby Institute. I also became a teacher of these techniques, giving compassion for people who didn't know as much but wanted to learn. Instead of being condescending I made it a mission to help them learn."

Ola Grimsby remembers connecting with Jojo: "Back in 1994, I toured the Philippines and gave lectures at both the Philippine Physical Therapy Association and the University of Santo Tomas and Jojo heard about me. He became a participant at the Institute here in San Diego and attended a few short term courses. Later he registered as a student and took a two year program. Then he took the second part of that four year program and was appointed an instructor with us. What was remarkable about Jojo was his enthusiasm. He was "gung ho" about the curriculum and everything in it. As a student here he actually wrote me poems about the curriculum and me and my background. He sent me among other things a beautifully framed Viking dagger. It's a gorgeous thing with all kinds of jewelry on it with a poem framed inside of it where he expressed his appreciation for what I did for him. There's no one like Jojo."

Grimsby said that the time Jojo most impressed him was immediately after he failed the final practical and oral exams. "The only time I've seen him really down was when an examiner wanted to fail him. It was questionable whether he should have been failed and the examiners differed in their observations. Of course, when you have been studying for four years and it all comes down to a ninety minute examination, that can be devastating. But he rebounded almost immediately. We decided to test him again and he went to his room. When he came back he said, 'I will take the test. I'm going to do even better.' You know that was four years of work that could've gone down the tube and it only took him ten minutes to recover

and then he was at full force ready to go forward. He's a very, very strong person." Sayson passed the second test with flying colors.

Through all of this he was still battling the aftermath of a failed marriage and he began to seek out new involvements that would help him refocus on the positive. This led him to one of the era's acknowledged masters of the power of positive thinking – Tony Robbins. "I studied his Personal Power tapes about motivation for 30 days and I learned quite a bit," he recalled. "Then I learned some other methodologies which I combined with what I knew from Scripture and all that eventually became my Human Factors in Motivation Seminars. It's not just teaching the scientific things and the skills. For it to work there has to be motivation. I would listen to the Robbins tapes whenever I was driving to school. At one point I thought to myself if whatever you think will come to you then I will one day meet Robbins and shake his hand. I said that in my room in 1991 and ten years later it came to pass" – Jojo met to talk and shake hands with Tony Robbins in Chicago.

It was around this time that another important visualization in Jojo Sayson's life began to come true – finding the perfect wife. The roots of this dream go all the way back to his watching television as a child. He recalled, "I remember watching this love story and there was this Japanese woman who was the perfect wife. I was in the second or third grade and I remember thinking while looking up to the blue sky 'somewhere out there my future wife is waiting for me.' And years later, after I married Nancy Islan, it occurred to me that although she is from the Philippines, her great grandmother was Japanese and she looks very Japanese. So much so that every time we are in the company of Japanese nationals they come over to her and speak in Japanese. That vision too came to pass."

After the divorce from his first wife, Sayson sought to have the marriage annulled through the Catholic church, which eventually complied. It wasn't long afterwards that he met Nancy. "I believe in that saying that love is like a butterfly," he stated. "If you try to catch it with your net it will fly away. But if you can just sit tight and relax it will land on your shoulder."

"During the time I was single I always had patients wanting to introduce me to their daughters or their sisters and that usually didn't work out. But one day this Filipina patient showed me a picture of her cousin who was single and lived up north in one of the Chicago suburbs. I really liked what I saw so I said I wanted to meet her. They arranged for me to call her. She was living with her mother at that time so I called her and asked "I would like to come and see you."

"She is a very traditional Filipina and not the type who would just go out on a date. She told me that I would have to send a picture of myself first because I had seen her picture. So I sent by overnight delivery a picture from an article in the hospital magazine which talked about me being the Director of the Outpatient Physical Therapy Department, where I was wearing a white coat and looked very professional. I was trying to impress the girl."

Nancy recalls their first meeting. "My cousin was his patient and she came over to my apartment one time and said she wanted to introduce me to her physical therapist. I told her I wasn't really interested. Then she gave him my picture without me knowing about it and gave him my phone number. That same night he called me and invited me out for dinner. I said 'Can we just stay home and I'll make dinner for you?' I didn't want to go out with someone I didn't know. Then I told him I wanted to see his picture first because he'd already seen my picture. He sent me some pictures overnight delivery. One was from an article where he was wearing his white lab coat and the other was a body

building one in which he was wearing a tank top. His abs were showing so maybe he was trying to impress me.”

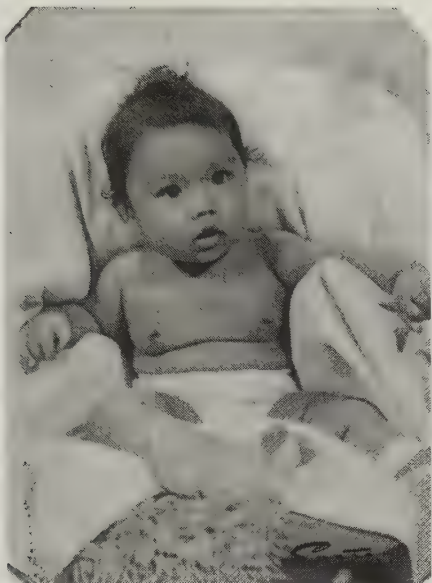
After seeing the picture Nancy agreed that Jojo could come to visit her. She wouldn’t go out with a stranger but he could meet her and her mother at their apartment. “I still had my red pick-up truck from Texas,” Jojo smiled, “and I was still wearing my tight jeans with the big belt buckle and my cowboy boots. At least I had stopped wearing the cowboy hat. So I brought some flowers and I knocked on the door. Her mother answered and I said good evening in the native Filipino dialect Tagalog and held out the flowers. I caught a glimpse of Nancy standing back in the corner sort of hiding and checking me out.”

“Her mother opened the door but the apartment was about an inch higher than the outside floor and I tripped and landed on my knees with the flowers in front of her mother. So there I was kneeling in front of her mother so I smiled and said, ‘How are you, Ma’am?’ It looked like I was begging and they both laughed.”

Jojo and Nancy began dating on a regular basis. He learned that Nancy’s deceased father was a police captain whose favorite actress was Nancy Kwan and so he named his daughter Nancy. So it was that less than three years from the time he had held a gun under his chin, Jojo Sayson had his career on track again, a new and greater dimension to his philosophy and a beautiful new woman in his life. He had come back from the precipice in glorious fashion.

♦

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Baby Jojo Sayson in 1963.
Holding his first born son hidden behind
white sheets is Alfredo



Jojo dressed in a Naval Officer's uniform
with Dad Alfredo



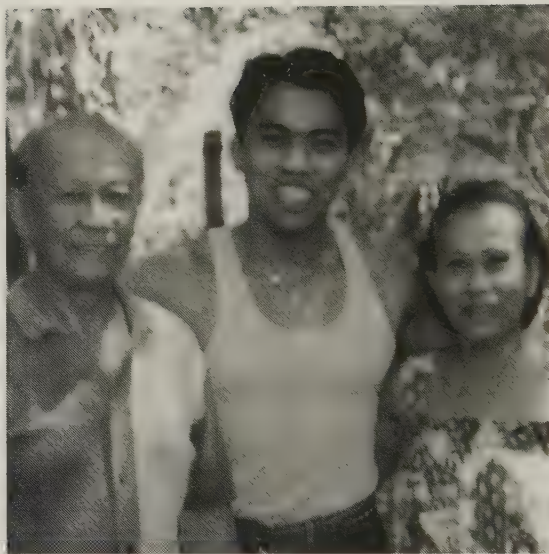
First piano recital at La Consolacion
School in 1972



Jojo's first superhero costume, Batman in
1966



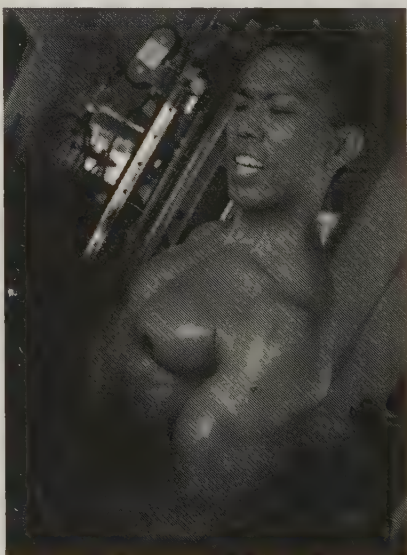
Dr. Jose Rizal (1861-1896), Philippine national hero and young Jojo's inspiration



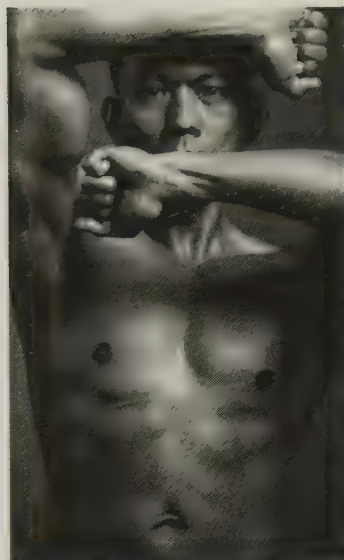
Last photo taken together in 1987 with Valcos grandparents "Tatang Memo" and "Inang Mengay" in Maronquillo, San Rafael, Bulacan, Philippines



Physical Therapy graduation 1984, Alfredo returns from Saudi Arabia



Disciplined Bodybuilding in Bourbonnais, Illinois



Jojo Body Shots by Leo Riingen



Last photo taken with brother James and sister Jeraldine before leaving for the USA in 1986



Teaching Doctoral students with the Ola Grimsby Institute held at Jojo's clinic



Jojo and Nancy wedding day, July 8, 1995



Capturing a tender moment in play with the apple of Jojo's eye...Jade



Jojo with John Talabis and Abet Baladad on a 2008 Grand Canyon mountaineering fund drive for CHILD Haus



Jojo with Nancy receiving the Outstanding Filipino-American Professional Award, Philippine TIME and People Magazine from the Illinois Sec. of State Jesse White in 2003



Jojo and Jade's 11th year father and daughter dance recital with the Starlight Dance Academy in 2011



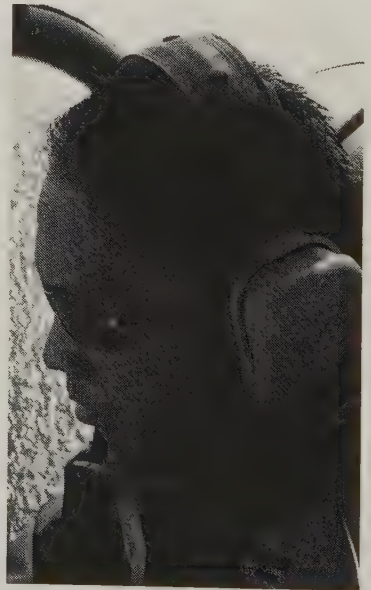
Jojo's tap dance performance at the Lincoln Cultural Center in Kankakee, Illinois



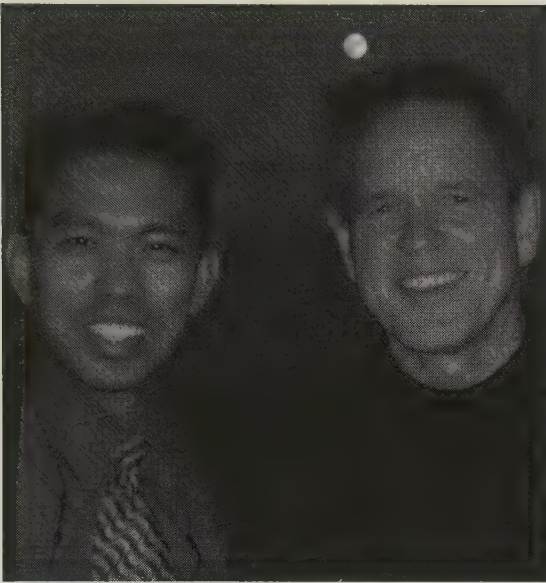
Playing with dolphins in Isla Mujeres, Mexico in 2007



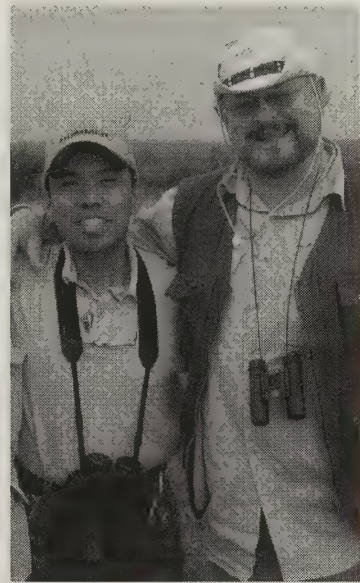
Miss Illinois 2009 Katie Lorenz with Lt. Commander Jojo Sayson giving a recognition award to WWII US Navy veteran Ray Olley, for his services during the 1944 invasion of Leyte Gulf, Philippines



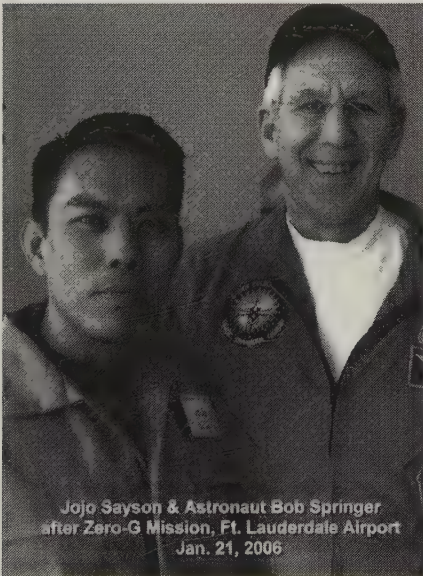
Helicopter aerial survey of Manila Bay with Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary 103rd Squadron in 2008



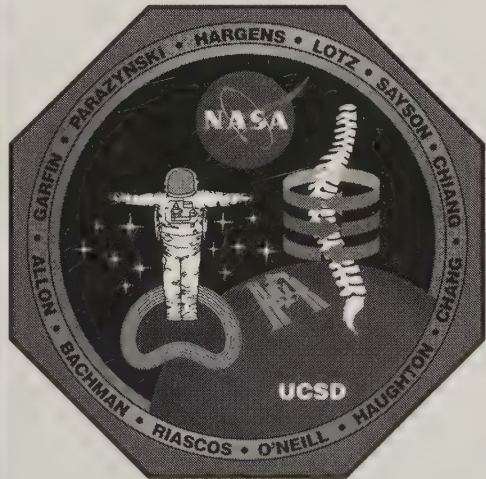
with mentor, NASA senior scientist Dr. Alan R. Hargens in San Francisco, 2004



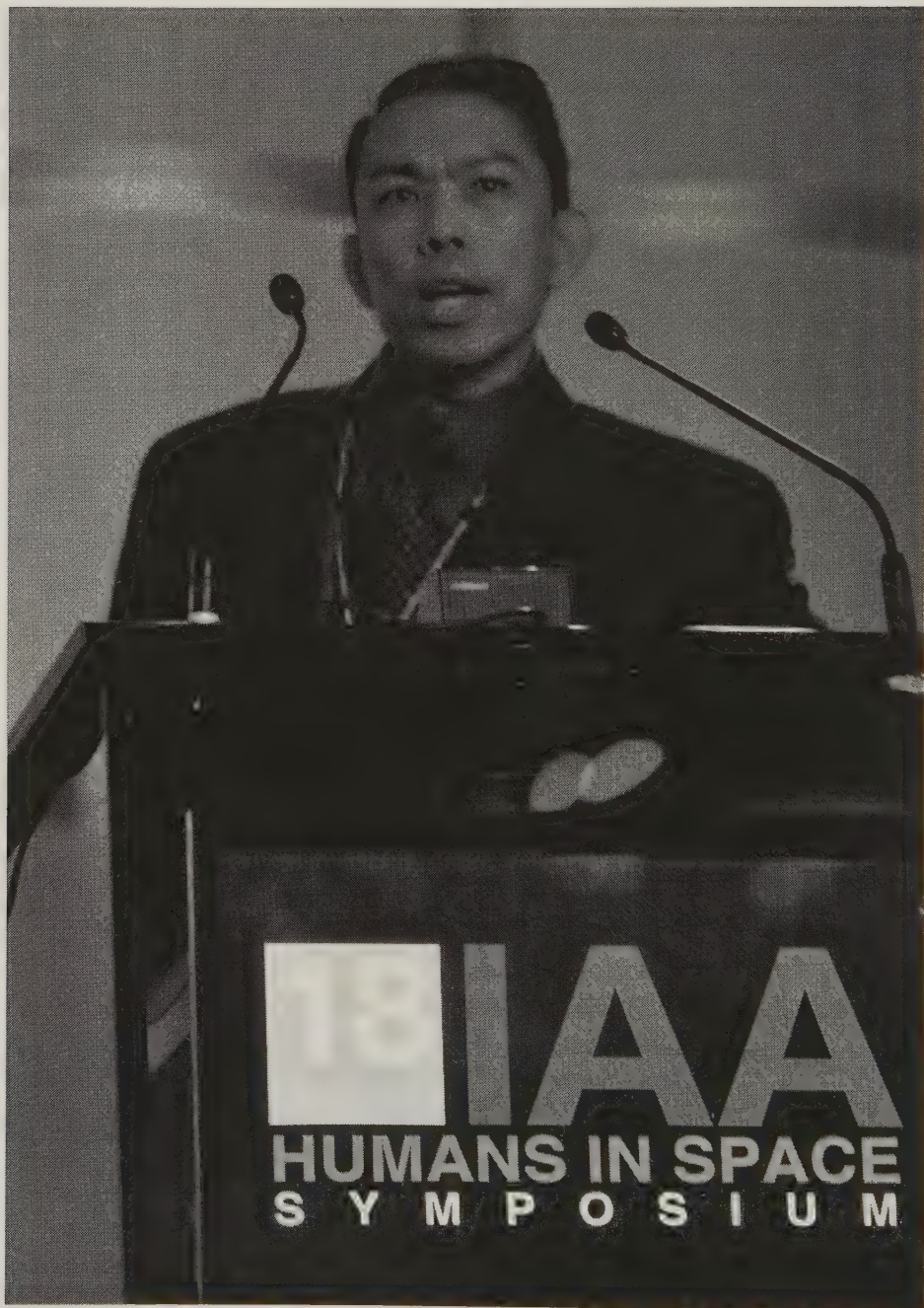
with Ola Grimsby during a photo safari in South Africa in 2003



Celebrating a successful 2006 zero-gravity parabolic flight with Astronaut Robert Springer in Ft. Lauderdale, FL



Mission patch for the NASA study Risk of Intervertebral Disk Damage after Prolonged Spaceflight designed by Jojo Sayson



Lecture to the Scientific community at the International Academy of Astronautics' 18th Humans in Space Symposium in Houston, Texas in 2011
Photo by J.R. Bachman

Chapter Five

Taking Root

“They can be a great people, Kal-El, they wish to be.
They only lack the light to show the way. For this
reason above all, their capacity for good, I have
sent them you... my only son.”

- Jor-El, Superman the movie 1978

Even though Sayson now had a good job doing what he liked, to attain an even greater mastery of his Physical Therapy profession he began to study more deeply. “I did not believe that I was good enough,” he said. “Sometimes my patients got better and, while I was happy for them, I didn’t know why they got better. And sometimes they didn’t get better and I didn’t know why. I was doing everything by the standard procedures. The only way to go beyond that is to really hone your instincts with advanced academic knowledge and clinical skills, to develop your professional intuition, which is something I learned from Ola Grimsby.”

Jojo began listening to his gut feeling about what would work best for his patients. And almost immediately his results started improving. “More people started getting better,” he related with satisfaction. “Instead of just trying something I began to really identify a problem. If you correctly identify the precise anatomical problem then you can apply the best procedure from the start without having to guess and try different options. I realized I had a real instinct for identifying the source of the clinical problem. I have an almost photographic memory so I don’t need to take a whole lot of notes, but I do self-evaluations

all the time. I believe that if you want to develop, you have to be humble enough to accept your mistakes. You have to put your ego aside when someone tells you that you are wrong because they may be right. I decided that anytime someone suggested a different approach for treatment that I would study that approach and if it made sense then I would try out the procedure. My abilities and techniques began to expand quickly.”

Sayson believes that taking this approach to new ideas applies to many areas of life and enables those who are humble enough to adopt it to evolve more quickly. “At a certain age people become comfortable with their routines - they wear the same clothes, listen to the same music, eat the same food - they live in a “comfort zone”. That’s a good recipe for depression because there is no stimulation for the human brain.”

“Research shows that the brain and the intellect continuously develop through old age. The physical body declines but the intellect has the capacity to keep increasing as long as the mind is regularly exercised.”

Sayson’s studies at the Ola Grimsby Institute with his instructor and nutritional mentor Didrik Söpler also led him to see a greater value in nutrition than he had been previously taught. “It’s not the things that you eat,” he explains, “but the things the body can absorb. Those are two different matters. The old saying ‘you are what you eat’ is really not quite true. ‘You are what you absorb.’ I’ve learned how to question conventional thinking. I love to work outside the box where no one ever usually goes.”

“It’s the same with the rest of my life. It reflects in the external, trying to do things like climbing a mountain and hiking through the wilderness at night, because you immerse yourself in the unknown. Only then will you create the ways and means for the unknown to become known. It’s a developmental philosophy that life is an exploration. To grow you need to step out of your comfort zone. You have to keep on challenging yourself

– physically, mentally, and spiritually. I’m seen by many as a physical specimen because I challenge my physical body with exercise and nutrition. I challenge everything. I think it’s not right to advocate a principle if you don’t walk the talk. I humbly try to walk the talk.”

Jojo Sayson is motivated by these challenges. His life is more about meeting and conquering new ones than making money. “Money has never been a main objective of mine,” he affirms. “I believe that if you’re doing what you were called to do more than well then money will come to you as a secondary benefit. My goal in life from the beginning was not to make it big – success will come if you are doing everything in the right manner. I think that human existence is based on fellowship, on bringing everyone together with a common purpose that involves getting back to God, getting back to where we came from. I have come to realize that the uniquely individual talents we possess were never meant for us alone, but instead be used for others. So you not only develop yourself but do what you can to uplift the next person. To me life is more like a divine experiment where we were left here by an all-knowing being to see what kind of experiences we would have – God might ask, ‘What did you do with the life I gave to you?’”

Around this time Sally Sioson moved to the United States to pursue her career in hotel and restaurant administration. “We reconnected on the phone and we would send each other Christmas cards,” She recalled. “And sometimes he would come to Orlando with his family and they would stay in my house. He is such a good friend to my entire family. There are few people you can say I love you to without feeling you’re being misinterpreted - it’s not a romantic kind of love. I can say ‘I love you’ to Jojo twenty times in front of my husband and he understands because I do love Jojo as a person. I understand him.”

After working two years at the new Rehab Center of a local hospital, Sayson realized his opportunities were limited. "I was so busy that I didn't fully grasp my situation until after two years," he said. "I had generated the hospital a gross profit of \$1.8 million but the system they had in place was not to my advantage. The administration back then would give me a clinic revenue goal and when I reached that goal I would get a little bonus of like three or four hundred dollars. Then they would raise the standard so I would have to work even harder to get my bonus the next time. "I would reach the goal again and they would have to give me the bonus and raise the goal again. They raised the goal three times in a single year. It was almost like business management would give me a bonus and then punish me for it. I was disappointed and felt unappreciated."

So, in 1993, Sayson resigned and started his own business. This time he partnered with a financier who owned a chain of physical therapy clinics in the Joliet, Illinois area. Recognizing that Jojo had built a good name for himself and a solid list of clients in the community, his new partner utilized "Sayson" as part of the business name. "He realized that my name would attract some patients to a certain degree. This time I had a contract and I was given a 20% ownership, but I had to do all the work."

Though he was now working harder than ever, Sayson kept up his studies with Ola Grimsby. While he had already learned that the most valuable knowledge often came from outside the educational system, he also saw the value in obtaining an advanced degree. "The confidence it gives you reflects in your abilities to do other things; how you present yourself to the public and how you engage people. You still have to have some humility but keep the ego in check and recognize that you are not any better than the next person, but it does help you in a number of ways."

It was at this time that Jojo proposed to Nancy, the woman whom he realized was the love of his life. “We got married on a sunny July 8, 1995 in Glendale Heights, Illinois, in a Catholic church wedding. I gave her a choice. I said ‘Nancy, we have some money. Would you like to get married in a church with a big wedding celebration or should we have a small civil wedding and buy a house?’ She chose to get married in church because that is a very important occasion in a woman’s life.”

As has been noted many of Sayson’s greatest accomplishments have actually stemmed from his childhood ambitions. Unlike most people, who tend to give up on the dreams of youth after they become adults, Sayson looks at these boyhood dreams as keys to his destiny – guideposts to follow in interpreting God’s will for his life. “When we are children,” he stated, “we form what is called ‘eidetic’ images in our minds. It’s much easier for children to visualize and believe something because they can see it more clearly in their minds than grown-ups can. These images carry over into adulthood. When I was playing with a little red toy truck and using the blankets on the bed as mountains, that became an eidetic image that later came to pass.”

“Most people lose this ability as they mature, but a small percentage, like one out of ten people, can still form eidetic images and ultimately build realities around their fantasies. For example, when I first started seeing my patients in the hospital sometimes to make it more exciting I visualized that they were aliens from another planet and the physical therapy department was the sick bay of the Starship USS Enterprise from the television show turned movies - Star Trek. People with this ability rarely get bored because in their minds they can transform their environment into something wildly different and pleasurable, but still be in touch with reality.”

Sometimes Jojo finds himself doing something unplanned that he realizes stems from a youthful desire while other times it is

planned, but as a natural outgrowth of that desire. His involvement with NASA and the space program is an example of the latter. “When I was young I remember watching Neil Armstrong climb down the ladder of his ship, the “Eagle” and step down on the moon,” he said. “And I remember watching all the classic science fiction TV shows like Flash Gordon and Buck Rodgers, and space monster B-movies. I knew there was something special for me in these experiences. Then when I was a little older in the third grade I stood in front of the mirror on my mom’s dresser, and I took a piece of paper and sketched a likeness of my face. I did a self portrait, but I depicted myself as an astronaut wearing a helmet. I wanted to be an astronaut, a scientist and an astronaut.”

In 1996, Sayson attended a lecture at the Ola Grimsby Institute which featured a well-respected scientist from NASA. Dr. Alan Hargens is a very prolific NASA researcher, a professor of orthopedic surgery based at the University of California in San Diego. He has a PhD in Oceanography/Marine Biology and three postdoctoral degrees and has written over 300 articles for scientific publications. “Dr. Hargens had become one of my heroes,” Jojo said. “He spoke on exercise in space and mentioned how astronauts develop low back pain on their space missions and no one really knows why that happens. I had some theories about it so I approached Dr. Hargens after the lecture. I told him that I believed the pain was coming from the disks interfacing with the sinuvertebral nerves and he told me to write about it and get it published in one of the scientific journals. So I took it as a challenge. Some people would give up at that point because it’s going to mean a lot of work if you want to do it right, but I kept on thinking about it and refining my theory.”

Jojo had just taken a significant step towards another dream – becoming part of the US Space Program.

Another great passion of Jojo’s began to come together about this time as well – being a Superhero. It started, of course,

with his fascination with the Superman and Batman comic books he'd read as a boy, but one day in 1996 he realized that he could put this dream into practice by wearing the costumes and visiting sick children. "I thought if I wanted to be like a superhero," he smiled, "why not be one, wear a costume, start visiting children and doing something to uplift them?"

"It's like what Christ said – 'Whatever you do unto the least of my brothers, you do unto me.' When I was a child I would have loved it if a superhero actually visited me, recognized me and guided me. But I never had that chance so I decided to create that experience for other children. So, I told my wife that I wanted to wear a superhero costume and visit sick kids. I had to wait until she stopped laughing. Naturally, she thought it was a bit ridiculous for a grown man to wear a costume but later she realized how much it meant to the kids. Pretty soon, there was a TV crew from the Philippines at our doorstep. When you have a radical idea often the first response of people is to ridicule you, but you can never allow ridicule to kill your dreams. I teach people to dream and dream big. If someone laughs at you, then fine, you at least made someone happy for that moment. Go for it!"

Sayson first dressed as Batman at a children's Halloween party for the Lions Club in Irwin, Illinois in 1996. Then he began visiting hospitals. "I also visited a home for sexually abused children," he continued, "and another for adults who were childlike in their minds – the mentally handicapped. Sometimes I would see an article in the paper about a child who was in need and I would call and visit that child as a superhero. Back in 1997 there was an article in the paper about a 10 year old boy who was in a car accident. His name was Chad Domont who was paralyzed from a car accident and developed speech difficulties. The article was about how Chad wanted to be a normal boy. He wanted to ride a bicycle, but he just couldn't so his mother wanted

to raise some money for Chad to buy a tricycle. There was a telephone number in the article and I had a strong intuition to call her. So I called and spoke to the mother. I told her I had read the article on Chad and would like to help. She said, 'Thank you so much for calling. I could really use some help. Who is this?' I was about to say my name when suddenly something occurred to me and I said, 'This is Batman.' I'm not even sure why I said it. It was quiet on the other end of the line and I started thinking, 'Oh no, she's going to think it's a prank call and hang up on me.' And then she said 'Oh my God! I've been praying to God for help for Chad and guess who calls? -- Chad's most favorite superhero!'

"So I ended up meeting Chad in my Batman outfit - one of my patients had sewn it for me and I bought the accessories - with my brother James playing Robin and we were able to help raise more than enough donations to get his tricycle."

After that, more and more opportunities opened for Jojo the superhero. He added. "James was also into superheroes because he read the comic books too. He continued to join me and pretty soon other people began putting on costumes and visiting sick children with us. We call ourselves The Alliance of Superheroes USA."

"We buy the costumes and change them a bit so there are no copyright infringements. I'm not really appearing as Superman- I'm Super Jojo or Batman Jojo. James used to be Robin but I think he got tired of being my sidekick so he became a version of Spiderman."

"There started to be a lot of press about it and then in 2005 a TV crew from the Philippines came to the U.S. to film a brief biography about me. That was nice, and I felt that God was now telling the world that we are doing this for the kids."

Jojo has appeared at numerous hospitals in America and in the Philippines. "The people in the hospitals know us because we do it every year," he said. "Here I can do Batman but in the

Philippines it's so hot that you can't put that vinyl cowl over your head. You sweat so much that it ruins the makeup and looks ridiculous. So I opted for the more tropical-friendly Superman outfit instead of Batman."

Sally Sioson says this is another aspect of Jojo Sayson that she admires. "Jojo and I have this line we say to each other – 'I get you, brother.' We always say that because I get him and he gets me. It's like the superhero thing he does for the kids. His characters can definitely be an inspiration to some people. My husband said I'd have to kill him before I could get him to wear a costume like that - but Jojo does it because he wants to make the kids happy. He goes beyond himself. He goes for the best in everything."

So what started as an idea that even Jojo admits was laughable blossomed into a genuine ministry that has brought comfort to many children both in America and the Philippines. "It's almost like the events start unfolding the moment I chose that path," he reflected. "I call this the 'Art of Knowing.' If you engage in something that helps people in need, you are allowing yourself to be used by God. Then things begin to happen and you just have to follow the leads."

Jojo always signs his emails with the words, "Godspeed and Speeding Bullets." Like everything he does, sending this message has meaning behind it; in this case double meaning. The first comes from his darkest hour, when he was about to end his life with a gunshot and then decided at the last second not to pull the trigger. That rescuing inspiration arrived "faster than a speeding bullet," and he wishes the same beneficence to everyone.

The second meaning derives from a Superman comic book entitled "Speeding Bullets," about the merging of Batman and Superman into one person, resulting in Batman having superpowers. "That was so cool," Jojo enthused, "that I put it into my email where I'm reminded of it every day."

As he grew, again running his own business and now in total charge of the day-to-day operations as well as the treatment methods, Jojo's skills as a therapist blossomed to yet another level. He began to focus on "orthopedic manual therapy" which he describes as different from traditional physical therapy, more of a sub-specialty. "competent Manual Physical Therapists use deductive reasoning during clinical evaluation and examination to find out the reason for the patient's specific problem. The things that we do in orthopedic manual therapy are based on sound science. Lets say somebody comes in with a pain, The first question is where is it coming from - from what part of the body?, what type of tissue?, is it bone?, cartilage?, ligament?, disc?, tendon?, muscle?, or is it referred pain coming from an internal organ? Perhaps it may even be psychological? You have to identify where it is coming from because that gives you a specific treatment plan for the right type of manual mobilization and exercise. What I add to that is my form of intuition. There is such thing as a 'professional intuition' which cannot be taught in school or from books. It's a thinking approach that is learned through mentoring with a competently experienced clinician."

Sayson primarily uses what is called the "Biomechanical Tissue in Lesion Model," in diagnosing a patient which incorporates deductive reasoning based on provocation - finding the pain triggers - to determine the ultimate cause of the problem. "If somebody has back pain, the reason could come from a variety of things – something directly in or around the spine, perhaps even a kidney in trouble or other organs of the abdomen or pelvis. So we do an evaluation based on several aspects to consider and differentiated by manual provocation."

"In the spine, for example, if it is a cartilage problem in one of the joints, the cartilage will get worse if you compress the joint surfaces together if the cartilage is damaged. If the disk is the issue I can test it if I compress and shear it and that will reproduce

the pain. If it's a ligament and I compress two joints together there won't be any pain because the ligaments are slackened. If the ligament has been damaged or partially torn and I pull it apart then it's going to hurt. If it's a muscle and I contract the muscle against resistance it will hurt in all joint positions."

"So once I find out the specific human tissue affected I can apply the appropriate treatment. Let's say, for example, there is a cartilage problem, then I will make sure that the joint is moving correctly and apply biomechanical energy or physical stress. I'll use exercises that compress and decompress, and glide the cartilage to provide the stimulus to make it regrow and heal again. If it's a ligament then we do exercise and manual motion to make sure it tugs in its longitudinal direction using a cyclical or intermittent tension. The whole body responds to physical stress but the magnitude of stress has to be appropriate which is pain-free. If it's too much, it tears the system and, if it's too little, it doesn't do anything."

This attitude of doing only what is appropriate for the patient is to be found in all of Sayson's business practices. "My business is not just built on what I can do clinically with my patients," he asserted, "but also on the connection I form with people. I try to create a genuine rapport so that they know they are being treated with dignity. You connect with clients by sharing the idea that genuinely helping them is more important than the money you receive as payment. Treating someone is more than being a salesman with a product, more than just an objective to earn money. My patients keep coming back to me whenever they have a problem because of this."

"The concept of giving more than you are taking should be a guiding principle because that's how the flow of blessings in life works. Blessings come back to you most of the time when you really need it. It levels out the potholes of life. Jesus said you will find me in the sick, in the dying, in the naked, the elderly, and

people who truly need help - that's the essence of the giving part. There is a need in each human heart and I believe that need is given to us by God. It's beyond what we can measure physically. That's why science cannot really prove or disprove God - God is beyond the measures of the realm of science."

Chapter Six

Making A Life

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”
- [Proverbs 23:7]”

Jojo had now settled into married life with the woman he knew was meant for him. On May 30, 1998, Jade Sayson was born. To say that he was a proud father would be an understatement. After all, this is a man who lives life to the fullest and takes almost everything he does as far as possible: It would be more accurate to say he was the proudest father on earth and now he had a beautiful little girl. Any father will admit that having that first child gives him a new perspective. In his arms is now cradled the reality of the shadow of the child in his darkest hour that was to be born and whose image stopped the speeding bullet from ending his life. He begins to examine his life to make sure that he has laid the necessary groundwork to assure the future he has imagined for that child. Along with this process comes a re-evaluation of your own dreams and goals. Are you on track? Did you get waylaid by the ebb and flow of life? Did you compromise? Did you give up?

As Jojo examined his life, he could not help but notice that so many things had worked out the way he envisioned them as a child. Not only the goals he had focused on and worked towards, but a variety of other things as well – things that many people might view as simple coincidences, but to someone who had long studied the power of the mind meant much more.

One example is that when Jojo was a child, he always carried a plastic airplane around with him in his pocket. It was a

replica of the American B-24 Liberator bomber from World War II. He would play with it all the time and imagine being in a real one. On August 10, 2004, while living in Kankakee he was given a ride as a flight crew member in a genuine B-24 Liberator (through the Collings Foundation). Just like the toy red pick-up truck he played with on his bed with the covers bunched up to look like mountains which he later drove for real through the West Texas peaks, Jojo's youthful envisioning had come to pass. Just like his wife being part Japanese, like the perfect wife he envisioned after watching a movie on television as a child.

There were many little things as well that had woven a connection through his wife. Nancy's middle name is "Monroy," after her mother's maiden name. In the Philippine history books the story is told how, as a young boy, Jose Rizal, Jojo's namesake and hero, lived in a province called Laguna and had a teacher named "Leon Monroy." Nancy's mother came from that area and was most likely related to the teacher. Little things began to connect as well. Like the time Jojo bought some flagstones for his backyard landscaping and was told that the stones were quite historical because they came from the Bracken family. Dr. Rizal had married an American woman, named Josephine Bracken. Little things, little connections that by themselves seem not to matter, but when added together implied something much more.

One of the most important examples of dreams being visualized into some form of reality was Jojo's fascination with superheroes. It began with reading the comic books his uncle brought back from Vietnam and it was surely a factor in his lifting the rusty old barbell he found when he was nine years old to the more formal bodybuilding programs when he was in college. "I was skinny and I really wanted to look like a superhero. So from having that image in my mind it seems like it got driven deep into me and became one of the templates for my life. So much so that, whenever I flew in an airplane I would

think that this is probably how a superhero would feel flying through the air.”

He loved to help people and he became a mild-mannered good guy easing people's pain all day long. Then, by night, he was a powerlifting strong man wearing tight body shirts. “It's important,” he asserted, “to have some form of fantasy that you can build around. Using fantasy to self-motivate I learned in Arnold Schwarzenegger's book, *The Encyclopedia of Natural Body Building*, where he has a picture of Conan the Barbarian as an example of such a fantasy.”

And now here he was, dressing like a superhero, cape and all, helping sick children. Throughout his life, so many of the concepts Jojo Sayson has thought upon and visualized have become his reality.

There was also the spiritual connection. A dramatic part of his childhood, this aspect of his life also moved into his adult reality. As if to remind him of this fact, Jojo had another spiritual dream. “I dreamt about the Jesus presence again, but this time it was not a white place, it was over a beautiful forest. I was a child again but I was actually hovering over this forest. The man in the white robe was hovering there too and, like before, I could not see His face, but I knew it was Christ from my previous dream. There were three other figures hovering around him and I understood them to be angels. I didn't see any wings, but I knew that's what they were. Then the man swooped over and picked me up and I became a small child again and he held and hugged me.”

Jojo experiences spiritual connections through dreams but could a spiritual experience be possible when one is awake? In 2003, Jojo, Nancy, and 5 year old Jade heard mass at St. Anne Catholic church in St. Anne Illinois. It was the annual public display and relic veneration of the finger bones of St. Anne, mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and grandmother of Jesus.

Jojo fell in line to venerate and kiss the relic and when he finally did Jojo experienced the inexplicable. “I respectfully kissed the relic held by the priest and when my lips touched it, I was surprised to have felt something like an electric shock. I really could not explain it but it sent my heart racing. Nancy did not experience what I felt. I was certain, there was something divine to that moment. St. Anne is the Patron Saint of Nancy to whom we both fervently prayed before for intercession to grant us a child...Jade.”

But there was still one area where Sayson was far from satisfied. His skills as a therapist had been honed considerably, but his therapy business was not all he had hoped it could be and he did not feel his hard work was being appreciated. The business was growing, and though Jojo was doing all of the work his partner would not let him purchase more of a stake than the twenty percent to which he had originally agreed. “I suggested buying more ownership,” he related, “but he was enjoying his large profit margin and wouldn’t share a small portion to sell it to me. There was nothing I could do. Then a friend of mine, a former classmate from my first two years of studies with Ola Grimsby approached me and suggested we start a business together. I didn’t have any money but he agreed to put it up if I would pay him back later.”

“So after seven years, I left the second partnership I was in and then had to deal with my former partner ignoring my requests to pay me the value of my business ownership. I kept on asking and nothing happened so I had to litigate him to get my money. I resigned in the year 2000 and it took me almost five years to get the money. Now, I think God had a hand in that as well. If I’d gotten the money when I resigned I would have put everything into stocks investment because that was the way to go at that time. And then, when the terrorists crashed the planes into the World Trade Center on 9-11 and the stock market plunged,

I would have lost a good chunk of it. So I realized God actually used someone's greed to save the full value of my money. At first, I would question God and say, 'Lord, this former business partner of mine is a rich man. Why do I have to suffer from this?' But God knew what He was doing."

It was around this time that yet another vision of Jojo came to pass – meeting Tony Robbins and shaking his hand. "In August 2001," he recounted. "I got a special invitation from some friends who used to work for the Ola Grimsby Institute to attend a three-day Tony Robbins seminar at McCormick Place in Chicago, which was going for \$5,000.00 a ticket. I will never forget the first exercise we did. There were about 1,500 of us and he had all of us walk around in the dark. Whoever you bumped into would tell you what his or her greatest fear was and in return you would tell that person your greatest fear. It was an experiment, but just about everyone I bumped into said that their fear was the 'fear of being alone'. I thought that was interesting because the solution to that is fellowship. We were made by God to be in fellowship with Him and each other, but most of us live like an island with a mental fortress around us. To me the fact that our Spirits crave fellowship is yet another confirmation that God is real."

Another exercise Sayson found compelling was walking barefoot on hot coals – becoming a firewalker. Outside of McCormick Place in Chicago, under Interstate-55 highway, Robbins set up a pit of hot coals. Jojo elaborated: "This was to train you to focus on your goals. Anthony Robbins said the only way to do it is to change your thinking. If you walk on the coals and you think they're hot you will burn, but if you can make yourself believe they are not hot, then you will not burn. It's like the Scandinavian warriors who would wear bear skins and make themselves go berserk before a battle. They would go crazy. The Norse word for a fierce warrior was 'berserker' and that's where we get the word berserk from today."

Besides making themselves believe the coals are cool than hot, firewalkers must visualize an objective on the other side of the coals – something they really and truly want. “First I convinced myself that walking on the glowing coals would be like walking over cool moss. Then I visualized my father Alfredo on the other side holding my hand the way he did when I was a child because someday, in the end, I will be with him again. I walked over the hot coals at normal pace and I didn’t feel a thing. There was no damage to my feet. That night I became a firewalker thanks to my Dad.”

It was through another task Sayson’s vision from ten years before of meeting Robbins and shaking his hand became reality. “There were 1500 of us in that auditorium and I wondered how it would be that I would connect with Tony Robbins. Then he gave us an exercise where we were sup-posed to visualize ourselves ten years from now. We were to visualize who we are right now and what we wanted to be and hoped to achieve in ten years. Afterwards, he asked who wanted to share their thoughts and everyone raised their hands. I raised my hand and I intently said ‘Tony!’ and somehow he heard me through all that noise in the crowd. He looked at me and told me to come to the microphone.”

“When I got on the microphone I told the assembly that I had done this exercise ten years before and now I have everything I envisioned at that time. I have my business, I’m remarried to a beautiful woman, I have my dream house, and I am doing the things I wanted to do after I listened to his Personal Power tapes ten years ago. Seeing me projected on two gigantic TV screens, all 1500 people started cheering and the cheering was so loud that Anthony Robbins turned to me and shook my hand and gave me a hug. And so that too happened exactly as I had said it would.”

Around this time Jojo contacted Dr. Hargens of NASA again. He reminded Hargens of their meeting in 1996 and said he had continued to work on the issue of astronaut back pain in

space. “I told him I was ready to write about it and asked him if he would consider writing the article with me. I had never been published before in a scientific journal. He asked me to send him a draft of my ideas and when he read it he contacted me and said he thought it was good stuff and he would help me turn it into an article that could be published for scientific review. This was music to my ears – a master scientist agreed with my concepts.”

Not long after this, when his family visited the Kennedy Space Center, Sayson was able to speak directly with an astronaut about the problem of low back pain in space. “There was an astronaut giving a lecture,” Jojo remembered. “His name was Mike Mullane and he is the author of the book *Riding Rockets: The Outrageous Tales of a Space Shuttle Astronaut*. He was talking about the life of an astronaut in microgravity and he mentioned that he had experienced tremendous back pain when he was in space and had to do a cannonball position to gain relief. So while people were getting in line to get a picture with him, I asked him if I could have a moment with him because I was writing a paper on back pain in space. He said he could give me only a minute and I talked to him as he walked towards another building and we ended up becoming friends. I e-mailed him and he was able to help me with some information.”

Space is often referred to as being in zero-gravity but the actual scientific terminology is microgravity because as long as you are in the perimeter of the Earth you are attracted by some degree of gravity even though it might be very small. Life in microgravity is very different. “One thing that is very interesting is how body fluids shift in astronauts. Normally, when you’re standing, gravity pulls blood and body fluids downward toward the feet. Our arteries and our veins are thicker as we get closer to our feet so they can hold the pressure whereas the blood vessels in the brain are thinner. If you stand upside down for too long your face will become flushed and puffy and it may potentially

burst your blood vessels because those vessels are not designed for that kind of pressure. In microgravity you don't have the gravity to pull fluids down to the feet so there is a shift of body fluids up toward the head. The astronauts develop what is called puffy face/bird leg syndrome. Because of the fluid shift toward the upper body and torso the face becomes puffy. You can see this puffy face transformation sometimes if you compare the before and after photos of astronauts. At the same time the legs become thinner so they call it the bird leg syndrome. Something funny Mike Mullane said was that microgravity is the best place for a woman because they will have skinny legs and large breasts."

It was during this time that Sayson renewed his relationship with the arts – in particular dancing. "When my daughter was just a little girl past 2 years old I enrolled her in dance classes," he recalled. "I wanted to give her all the opportunities I never had. Locally, I found the Starlight Dance Academy and April Lynn, who had danced for the Joffrey Ballet in New York and Chicago. Then I thought if I'm going to have my daughter grow up and learn to dance should I just be a spectator? How could I make her memories of this experience much more meaningful? Most of the time children grow up remembering their parents on the sidelines taking pictures, but I wanted to do more. So I thought why not join in this experience with her - become a dance student, be part of the recitals and have pictures together? At the same time I would be fulfilling what I wanted to do as a child - learn to tap dance."

Of course, this made Jojo the oldest member of the class, but he doesn't let objections like this stop him when he believes something is right. "The typical barrier to doing something like this," he related, "is to say 'I'm too old for that' and the truth was that all my classmates were children and I was the oldest student. I was still the oldest student eleven years later, but there are so many more positives than negatives to such an experience."

“It seems like we are so conditioned by society to be restrained even in the way we walk and talk. Watch a child kick a can and just kind of fling their arms around as if the world was just such a beautiful place, while the adults go around sad and serious. I think people get depressed or bored with life because they think they can’t do anything free like that for fear of being criticized by others.”

“We are a product of a combination between right and left side brain functions. The left side brain is the more logical, thinking part while the right side brain is the more creative part, and many people are in a rut because they are mostly using only one side of their brain. Using the creative part of our brain by singing, dancing and the arts, balances out our moods and creates renewed enthusiasm in life. Henry David Thoreau had a saying that ‘no one is as old as someone who has lost enthusiasm.’ Enthusiasm is the key to life!”

Ola Grimsby recalls Jojo’s musical side: “I remember him as a musician. I chartered a 110-foot schooner one time with my instructors. I think it was used as a pirate ship in a Hollywood movie. We had 25 or 30 of our instructors as the crew and we had lectures below deck. Jojo was sitting on the ships’ bowsprit and he had brought this authentic Iroquois Indian reed flute. He played this beautiful music as we were sailing along up the California coast. It just created an atmosphere that was very enjoyable and unforgettable.”

In 2003 Jojo finally gave up on his old red pick-up truck and purchased the car of his dreams, in fact a 7,000 lb. super truck – a brand new metallic sage green Hummer H2. “I drove the old red pick-up truck for 16 years,” he said fondly, “and it was second hand when I bought it. It pretty much fell apart. I had never bought a new car so one day I thought, ‘well it’s time to buy my dream car. It was my first brand new car.” Jojo had found six deactivated tank destroyer missiles and an old WWII .50 caliber

machine gun which he had mounted on top of his Hummer. “I appreciate all the US and Filipino war veterans so I decided to become a one-man parade to give thanks to these servicemen and women. And when it is time to visit children wearing my Batman costume, then it becomes the Bat-Hummer.”

Sayson’s practice continued to grow and so did his understanding of his vocation. He began to add and incorporate proper nutrition into his healing plans. He elaborated: “Nutrition is not my professional specialty but it is so necessary and so many people need to know about it. The human body is composed of many cells and those cells are never dormant. The body is continually rebuilding itself, so your nutrition has to be consistent and you have to have the right micronutrients to rebuild. To heal, I provide my patients with biomechanical energy through exercise, but they must add the nutritional energy and rest.”

“These three things comprise optimal healing but there’s one other factor superimposed above all of them and which is the ‘motivation.’ The person must want to heal because if they don’t they will deviate from what is good for them. I also tell people that whatever you believe - whether you can or you cannot - you are probably right because the power of belief is so strong. It is woven in every aspect of living.”

“We have models of scientific thinking using theories to figure out the most likely cause of the pain and dysfunction,” he continued, “and to determine if the condition’s onset is something acute or sudden, or something that’s progressive. We have biochemical models to look into and I usually confirm my clinical impression with the history of the patient to the point that with a strategic correlation, you could practically guess what the patient did even if the information was not given freely at first. I would ask, ‘did you do this and they say, yes I have been doing this kind of posture or action.’ So I explain and

teach them not only what I'm finding but also what they can do to keep the problem from recurring. A precise diagnosis leads to precise treatment and good results."

"One of the differences in modern western medicine is that physicians have a different way of addressing this issue. Western medicine is basically a team operation where the doctor is giving the orders, but the educational background of a physician is often not updated or specialized enough in regard to advances in physical therapy. The latest physical therapy concepts, techniques and treatments may not always be taught to them. Patient management in the United States is very territorial - everyone wants to be considered right and there seems to be less professional inter-disciplinary collaboration. Because of this and because the individual professional ego is involved, there may always be surgeries or any other procedures that should have been done later instead of earlier, or not at all. Like any profession, there are good and bad doctors, just as there are good and bad physical therapists."

While Sayson stresses the importance of having the mind involved in the healing process, he also strongly believes that the power of God is very real and should be acknowledged as well. "There is so much potential, and each person should view the world in their own unique way, but when it comes to the spiritual world there has to be a guide. I do believe in my heart that the guide is the Bible, the bestselling book of all time. There is no other book in the world that has been printed in so many editions and quantities throughout history."

"You must also have some mentorship. This means learning wisdom by following leaders in their fields who have what it takes to succeed. Of course, there can be a danger of following just one person, because it is human nature for leaders to have a tendency to abuse power if absolute. That is why you have had cults in the past. But if you do your own soul

searching, seek good counsel from others and balance it all with wisdom taught in the Bible, then you have a pretty good formula for success in this life and everlasting peace and joy in the next.”

Chapter Seven

The American Dream

“The life given us by nature is short, but the
memory of a life well spent is eternal”

- Cicero

In 2005 Jojo Sayson met a Catholic priest named Father Johnny Planea who was traveling the United States to raise money to build a library for the poor people of Tagapul-an (small island near Leyte, where General Douglas MacArthur landed in 1944 to save the Philippines from the Japanese in World War II). The meeting was significant, as it would lay the foundation for many important works. “I gave him \$1,000 which, of course, meant much more over there than here,” said Jojo, “and I began gathering books for the library as well. I ended up collecting and shipping over 800 pounds of books through the kindness of my patients and friends. I’m happy that now there’s a high school level library for the poor children there.”

The fact that he was able to do something significant to help these people, even though he wasn’t a wealthy in a position of great power started Sayson thinking: Why should he wait until he was retired or considered wealthy to begin helping the people he wanted to help? If God led and God provided then why not do it now? “I realized that I have a passion for children because I cherish that period of life. It is a time of innocence and should be untarnished, where a child can learn about the world and discover who he or she is without the negativity of adults bearing down on them. I want to help children have that kind of life.”

“I know that misfortunes befall many people and there will always be suffering but if I can have an opportunity to ease that burden a bit and at least help a few children, then I should do it. Children are the future of humanity. The corrupt people in the Philippines, or anywhere else in the world taking advantage of others, will never change, but eventually those people will pass on and it will be the children who will take their place. If you can help the children you can change the world. I had always thought that one day when I retire and had a good source of cash flow I would help build churches, schools, libraries to help children. But then it dawned on me then that I don’t have to wait until I’m old and feeble. There is a great deal I can do right now.”

Sally Sioson comments on this side of Jojo: “He is so driven. I tell him a lot of time, ‘how do you do it and why do you go that far?’ It’s always a good cause but still he spends a lot of money on things he doesn’t have to support. He spends money on things he believes in. Jojo is a much more spiritual man now than when I knew him back in the Philippines - maybe I just didn’t know it back then. Maybe back then he was religious and now he’s spiritual. Maybe the challenges of life made him spiritual. He connects to people through his inner being. I feel like I’m in kindergarten standing next to someone with a doctorate when it comes to spiritual things with him.”

Sayson began channeling his passions to help more people. He had long loved climbing mountains, for example, but now when he would organize a climbing trip it would also be developed a fundraiser to benefit one of the organizations he was supporting. “My friend John Talabis invited me to climb a mountain called Angels Peak in Monument National Park in Utah,” he recalled. “While we were planning it, I thought, if we are going to do this kind of thing, why don’t we try to make it an activity to benefit a cause on the next climb? I was international vice-president of the University of Santo Tomas High School,

Batch 1980 Alumni Association then, so I was presented with an avenue to help and we began planning another climb to raise funds for children in need.”

To Jojo Sayson taking risks like mountain climbing is a part of living life to the fullest. “For example, we went to the lowest continental point in North America, in Death Valley National Park, and then another time hiked down and back up the Grand Canyon. To me these activities for a good cause are a celebration of life. Most people sit back and let go, and become overweight when they reach middle age but you can still be healthy and enjoy life to the fullest. I don’t want to look back when I’m 80 and wish I would have done something differently in my younger years. Our existence is unpredictable - anyone can die tomorrow - so why not embrace these experiences that provide memories which will echo in eternity?”

“There are at least a couple of things you should take with you when you die. The first is your dignity and the second is the memories of your life - I do not believe that your memories will disappear. The law of conservation of energy states that energy cannot be created nor destroyed. It can only be transformed, so all these thoughts and memories in the form of electrical energy can never be destroyed after all. Memories will survive with you into the next life, a real dimension beyond what we understand”

The next climb was a peak called Half Dome Mountain in Yosemite National Park. This time the adventure was to raise money for C.H.I.L.D Haus (Center for Health Improvement and Life Development, a residence for children with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses in Manila) and Sayson obtained pledges from contributors prior to the trip. The venture began with an event that he considered a good sign from above: “I went to O’Hare International Airport in Chicago to fly out to meet my climbing team in California and while I was waiting to check in at Southwest Airlines there came an elderly Asian lady in a

wheelchair being pushed by an orderly. He pushed her close to the gate and then left her there without even saying goodbye.”

“I could see the woman had fear in her face and I was compelled to approach her. I was sure she would be happy to see an Asian face and I said, ‘Good morning, Ma’am, are you okay? Do you need some help?’ She fumbled through her purse and handed me a piece of paper that read ‘I am Vietnamese, I do not speak English.’ She looked at me with questions written on her face and handed me her travel documents. I could tell that she wanted to find out if she was in the right spot.”

“I looked at her papers and I gestured to her that she was okay. I could tell she understood because she smiled and her face turned calmer. She gave me the Vietnamese gesture of thank you, which is almost like a one-handed prayer with repeated bows, and then I left. I was thirsty so I went to the store to get a bottle of cold water, but when I was ordering I felt something, like an angelic tap on my shoulder. I realized she was probably thirsty so I got two bottles and brought one to her. She thanked me again and as I walked away, I saw her drink it. She was thirsty. I have a habit of talking to God and I said, ‘I hope I did what You wanted and I hope I pleased You.’ Then I looked down and there was a shiny penny on the ground. I picked it up and of course it said ‘In God We Trust’. I held it in my hand and thought, ‘This is my lucky penny for the climb.’ Thank you, God.”

As it would turn out Sayson and his crew (high school friends John Talabis and wife Hanne, Chito Rabadam, and Carmen Vizcarra) needed quite a bit of luck on this excursion. “We underestimated our supplies and I sprained my ankle during the first hour of the ten-hour climb. I decided not to tell my team because I didn’t want them to try to make me quit. After all, I was the captain and I was the one getting people to give us donations for C.H.I.L.D. Haus so I swallowed several ibuprofen pills like M&Ms chocolate candies and kept climbing. The last hundred

feet were almost vertical but by then it was almost 7:00 pm and getting dark. People don't climb there at dusk because you won't have time to get back. It was pretty bad. Then I remembered this young girl named Anabelle, an amputee with cancer, who had just died that week."

"She was just a teenager and one of the residents of C.H.I.L.D. Haus. I had given her a picture of me as Superman that I had signed. I used to give her presents whenever I came there and then I got a text message from Yna Valenzuela, the President of our alumni association that she had died of her cancer. So now, as I was climbing, I spoke to her. I said, 'Anabelle, this climb is for you.' Since I was the first to climb, my team couldn't see that I was crying when I was scaling the granite wall. 'This is for you Anabelle, for C.H.I.L.D. Haus in your name. I'm going to get some money for the children in honor of you. I climbed and I climbed and I made it. There is a picture of me standing on the famous tongue of Half-Dome, a precipitous ledge reaching outwards from the peak about a mile high from the Yosemite granite floor."

Upon reaching the peak Jojo asked his group to hold hands and pray. He invoked Psalm 18:2, one of his favorites: "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I trust."

But the worst was yet to come because now Sayson and his crew were stranded on the mountain and night had fallen. "Coming down was very unsafe. There were four of us: My high school best friend, John and his wife Hanne, Chito, and me (Carmen could not scale the mountain and had to turn back half-way into the climb) and we weren't prepared for night climbing. We had flimsy flashlights and we ran out of water and food. My ankle was ballooning from the sprain and Hanna was really concerned that foraging bears might attack us. Everybody was scared and it was pitch black. I was the last hiker because

my ankle injury had made me the slowest one now. It was dark but, whenever I looked up, the stars were so beautiful. I began thanking God and saying, 'This is for you, Lord.'"

"Then suddenly, out of nowhere, we heard singing. Somebody was singing and there was a guitar playing. We followed that song and it led us to a camp where a man was singing and playing while three other men sat watching him around a camp fire. It was unbelievable that we found these people in the dark of the night. We said, 'We're sorry to disturb you, but we're lost, tired and hungry. Can we buy some of your food and water?' Actually, I came out and begged them to help us."

"And they were very kind and helpful. They got us food and we sat down to get warm by the fire. And then two men came up to me and handed me a jug of water for our team to drink. One of the men said 'we are Vietnamese.' It was then I realized that this was my reward for helping the Vietnamese elderly woman at the airport. The penny was a sign that the reward was coming and now here it was. I had given a Vietnamese woman some water when she was lost and needed it and now two Vietnamese men were giving me some water when I was lost and needed it the most. The God we serve is real and very personally involved in our lives."

Besides his humanitarian causes Jojo was providing help and inspiration on an everyday basis to another group of people – his patients. Dan Franklin was one of those. "I first met Jojo in the summer of 2005 after I injured myself," he says. "I had been putting myself through some pretty rigorous training because I was planning to join the US Navy and I wanted to try out for one of their special programs. I hurt my thigh and went to see Jojo."

"He's very particular about diagnosing your problem. He knows his stuff. Right off the bat, he looked at me and said 'You're right handed, aren't you?' He could tell that just from looking at me. Before long he found out what the problem was,

put me on a program and nursed me back to health. Right away I noticed that he was a different individual. He was very open and outspoken about his beliefs. I knew he was a believer right away because he was so uplifting to the people around him.”

As happens so often with Sayson’s patients, he soon became more than just a therapist to Dan Franklin. “He was very interested in the fact that I wanted to become a Navy Seal. He was interested in me as a person and cared about my goals in life. I think we connected a little bit in that area because he has goals for his life that are pretty challenging and he really encouraged me to keep it up. He said that I should trust in God and that, when you live for God, He has your future in his hands so you never have to give up.”

It wasn’t long before the rigors of Franklin’s training took these concepts beyond the philosophical and into harsh reality. “When the training got really tough I would think about Jojo saying these words of encouragement, telling me to stand fast, keep strong and not give up. That helped me get through the part of training that is the most challenging physically and mentally.” After making it to the second phase of the Navy Seal program, Dan Franklin moved to Navy OD [Ordnance Disposal] which is the Navy bomb squad and requires two years of training, the toughest part of which was the underwater swim. “That was pretty rigorous. I really had to remind myself of Jojo’s encouragement. The OD specializes in anything from IEDs [improvised explosive devices] to capturing mines and that can be underwater or above ground. Right now it’s more focused on land work just because the war is in the desert.”

Franklin was also parachute-qualified and had just returned from a tour of duty in Iraq. He communicates with Jojo on a regular basis. “We’ve stayed close friends since then. I pray for him and he prays for me. My family still lives in his area and when I’m in town I’ll call him up and ask if he has time to meet.

He has always made time for me. He also graciously helped me after I joined the Navy and had injuries to my muscles. He set time aside to help me free of charge. That meant a lot. We talk and pray together. He shares his goals in life and his Christian walk and asks me about mine and really encourages me. He's like a brother. I believe that he has a God-given ability to help people."

As of this writing, Dan Franklin is deployed on the U.S.S. George H.W. Bush, one of the most advanced aircraft carriers in the United States Navy.

During this time Sayson was also hard at work on his scientific paper for NASA concerning the problem of astronaut developing back pain in space. "I kept on writing and rewriting. I would send my work to Dr. Hargens in San Diego and occasionally I would go there and we would meet. All together it took about five years to write and finish the paper. We called it 'Pathophysiology of Low Back Pain during Exposure to Microgravity.'"

"As I was writing about back pain in microgravity I began to realize that I personally have not experienced how that feels. I have seen people floating in space on television and movies (which looked like fun), but I had no clue as to the way it really felt. So I surfed the internet and came across Zero-G, a company that offers a private space venture which allows civilians to experience what they call zero-gravity. They employ the exact same procedures that are used to train the astronauts. The company is run by Dr. Peter Diamandis who is also a medical doctor. He was also the CEO of the X-prize Foundation which was the company that organized a contest some years back awarding a prize to the private company that can send a spaceship to orbit and return it safely. The ship that won is called Spaceship One and Dr. Diamandis' picture is in the Museum Science & Industry in Chicago right now."

For the adventure in January of 2006, Sayson and the others rode in a Boeing 727 that had been converted to allow

enough room for the passengers to experience weightlessness. The participants had to undergo medical exams to confirm that they didn't have heart problems, and take medication to prevent dizziness and vomiting. The flight was conducted over the Gulf of Mexico in a hundred mile FAA (Federal Aviation Authority) restricted area. "They take you up to 34,000 feet," Jojo related, "but from 24,000 they climb at full throttle to the stratosphere at an angle of 45 degrees. Once we reached 34,000 feet the aircraft went into a controlled dive back down to 24,000 again at 45 degrees, in under thirty seconds. This controlled fall creates microgravity for the people inside the plane."

Sayson says that while the experience looks exactly like the news films of people floating in space, it didn't feel the way he had expected it to feel. "Now, when people ask me how zero-g feels, I have an answer. It is a helpless feeling because you are at the mercy of the last force exerted upon your body. If you push yourself in any direction you just keep on going that same direction. If you are not used to it you look like a fool because you try swimming in the air. When you are in water you can propel yourself by pushing against its viscosity, the cohesiveness of water molecules. Even though I knew that there is no viscosity in the air, on the video of me floating I saw that I was trying to tread in the air, a reflex response to being in water."

"We did a simulation of Martian gravity as well," Jojo continued, "which is about $1/3$ g, or a third of the gravity of Earth. It was quite interesting. You feel so much stronger. It's like you're a superhero on another planet. We also did some of the things Neil Armstrong did with lunar gravity, which is $1/6$ g or a sixth of Earth's gravity – the way they jumped and ran. And I did some activities like twirling and doing pushups with three men on my back, and it was all exactly like you saw it on those news films. It could never have been a camera trick as purported by conspiracy theorists who claim that the moon landings were a fake."

All in all, "It was a very good experience for me," Jojo concluded. "It did not add anything factual to what I was writing, but it sort of empowered me to write with more authority about the subject."

Former astronaut Robert Springer was one of the instructors for the pre-flight ground training. "I was able to arrange a meeting to ask him about back pain in space," Jojo recounted. "He said that he'd had back problems and he asked NASA about it during that time and NASA didn't know what to do."

Springer also gave Jojo details on his microgravity training as an astronaut. "He said that if you throw a ball in micro gravity it will keep on going forever unless another force acts on it. Before Springer went into orbit on one of his previous Space Shuttle missions, they practiced the docking procedure in water until they could do it perfectly, but when they got into space they couldn't dock with the satellite because when they practiced they failed to consider the viscosity of the water as a factor which, of course, was absent in microgravity. So whatever force they used was too much and when the satellite would contact the robotic arm on the Shuttle it would bounce back and separate.

"Microgravity is an interesting phenomenon," Sayson continued. "Another example - if your spaceship is in high orbit and you have another spaceship following after it, how can you overtake it if you are in orbit? Do you accelerate or decelerate? You would think you would accelerate, but that is the wrong answer. To overtake the spaceship ahead you have to decelerate because if you diminish your speed when you're in orbit you will start to fall towards the curvature of the Earth which means you're actually going to go faster below the other ship's curved trajectory and overtake. So you have to slow down, fall faster below the other spaceship and then accelerate again to be back in orbit with the other spaceship now trailing behind you. How fascinatingly weird is that?"

So, armed with actual microgravity experience, Sayson attacked his scientific paper with new relish: “I was able to finish the work by the end of 2006 and submitted it to the prominent journal *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine*, the official journal of the Aerospace Medical Association (AsMA). I was fortunate to have Dr. Alan Hargens as my co-author. I consider him one of my heroes and I was honored that he would allow me to put my name together with his. He guided me in the process. And then it was read by his friends, who were all authorities in the scientific community. Everybody thought it was a great article and so we submitted it.”

After submission the next step in getting a scientific paper published is having it accepted for the review process. This is where a team of scientific experts evaluate the work and make recommendations for improving it. Jojo elaborated. “Your work is going to be reviewed by selected experts and you never know who they are, but usually they are the top notch scientists in that field. Normally you get the paper back within a couple of months with some notes on changes they feel you need to make, and then after you comply with all the suggested changes then it is accepted to be published within a few months.”

“Our paper went back and forth for review several times. We would have a set of reviewers and they would return the paper with the things they questioned and we would have to revise it and then the process would start all over again. So it was refined many times. I felt like I was going through a meat grinder. It was difficult to keep on rewriting it.”

Sometimes the various reviewers and editors assigned to the project differed in their opinions or work against each other. “When it was reviewed by an astronaut physician he wanted so many things added that it blew my 5,000 word paper up to almost 9,000 words,” he recalled ruefully. “Then after more than a year of changes it was sent back to *Aviation, Space, and Environmental*

Medicine's chief editor-in-chief, Dr. Nunneley, and she sent me an e-mail saying they wanted to print it but it needed to be reduced to under 5,000 words. She said she knew that it had grown because everyone wanted to add things and she said she was giving me a challenge. So then I had to rewrite it all over again under Dr. Hargen's guidance. But that's how it is with anything that is truly worthwhile – it takes a lot of work.”

Chapter Eight

Know Thyself

“Accept the things to which fate binds you and love
the people with whom fate brings you together, but
do so with all your heart.”

- Marcus Aurelius

By 2007 Jojo's efforts on behalf of the people of the Philippine had become recognized and he was approached by Jerry Simon, a friend from high school who now was a captain in the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary, Air Operations Wing, 103rd Squadron. Jojo elaborated. “Jerry said, ‘Jojo, what you’re doing is the kind of thing we do in the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Why don’t you join us?’ Membership is by invitation only, and he recommended me to Rear Admiral Ernesto Levanza and Commodore Errol Ramirez. I had an interview with them and, thanks in part to my ROTC training, my advanced degrees, and some flight experience, after about a year I was commissioned as a Lieutenant Commander.”

The 103rd Squadron performs military rescue operations, and also humanitarian projects. “It’s paramilitary,” Sayson continued, “but it helps me a great deal with the work I’m doing there. This is just another example of how when God leads you to do something, He will open a pathway to do it.”

“My first mission was to help restock one of the libraries in Jomalig island off Quezon province. I sent all kinds of books which I had gathered from patients and friends at my own expense. That was mission accomplished. I had always wanted to help build a school and now the Coast Guard Auxiliary is building it.

They're doing it on property that's been donated by the Admiral so I don't have to buy it and that helps. For my second mission, now I have some form of authority, I have men, I have access to aircraft, and whenever I'm in the Philippines I have all kinds of assistance. When I went to survey the place I rode in a private helicopter that was piloted by the Admiral. The Philippine Coast Guard salutes me when I return over there. Being part of the Coast Guard Auxiliary really helps me accomplish a lot that I feel God has asked me to do; I could not do it without their help."

One of the most respected men Sayson connected with through being part of the Coast Guard Auxiliary was Dr. Ted Esguerra, Chief Medical Officer of the first successful Philippine Mt. Everest Expedition in 2006. He described meeting Jojo Sayson in the Philippines: "To me it was like meeting a long lost brother. I see in him the traits of our great forefathers in the days of old. He seems to be like a 'reincarnated' tribal leader of an Igorot or Bagobo tribe in our highlands here. A tribal leader is somewhat of a renaissance man. He must be a man of great physical prowess, a warrior to defend his village. But he must also be an artist who can dance in wedding ceremonies, paint and sculpt images during seasons like harvest, and write poetry and songs during religious festivals to retain the cultural richness of his tribe. A tribal leader must also be a strong symbol of faith, a religious intermediary and philosopher and he must be a man of science who learns from and collaborates with everyone from shamans to local agriculturists. He experiments to improve life in his tribe and he is skilled in the art of war. The tribal leader must encompass all these undertakings and Jojo Sayson does them all."

Though he is gifted and seeks to do God's will, this does not mean that Jojo is free from troubles and it was in this period that he had to face a recurring problem in his life – business partnerships that just have not worked out. Regretfully, he recalled. "My 3rd business partner, my former classmate in

advanced classes in physical therapy, “borrowed” money from our account without my knowledge and basically cleaned it out. He had a lot of financial issues. So even though I had become a 40% owner, in the end, after all my years of work in the business, I had no money. Once again, I had been the man in the trenches doing all the work, but any suggestions I had made about the business were not heeded because he was busy trying to build other businesses. Since I was doing all the work and getting tired of it, I wanted to purchase more ownership, but he wouldn’t allow that either. Again, another business partner became comfortable with his large profit margin. When greed takes over, consideration to reward the lone hardworking associate could never be part of the equation.”

“I realized that when you try to be a good person and work hard there are still situations out there where people will take advantage of you. If you trust blindly and give the shirt off your back, you will lose your shirt. So here I was where I had to consider litigation again. But this time I had been careful to document everything so I was in a very good position legally and matters worked out in my favor. After this, though, I decided I wasn’t going to have any more partners. Even though I had tried very hard, the same old pattern was happening. So I decided that from now on, I would do it on my own.”

By now Jojo’s daughter Jade, was nine years old. Like everything else he does, Jojo worked hard at being the best father parent he could be. “Being a good parent,” he noted, “is challenging and requires not only that you work at it but that you continually monitor yourself to see if you’re doing the best job you can for the child. In the United States, most parents are so worried about hurting their child’s emotions that they don’t provide the kind of realistic guidance the child needs. For example, if you have an eight year old child who sings the parents will be so afraid of criticizing the child’s performance that they give the

child an unrealistic view about their talent by over-praising. So then the child may think he or she is a great singer when in fact they can't carry a tune at all. But even worse, they don't get the opportunity to improve because they don't have a realistic sense of what they need to do to get better and become unprepared to face the sometimes harsh realities of life."

Sayson adds, "and when the child starts functioning in the world outside his or her home they will find out very quickly that they aren't good enough to succeed. By now if the child has been unrealistically sheltered from constructive criticism, they aren't prepared to face the real world. We should encourage our children but leave room for improvement. When my child performs for me I applaud her but I also tell her that while that was good and I loved it, it could be better. I tell her that there are others who are better at this than she is and I want to help her be as good as or better than the others. Then I tell her what she can work on to improve. By doing this I'm preparing my child for the real world so when someone tells her she is not good enough she will be able to use that to rise to the occasion and become outstanding."

Sayson says that he's adapted this model by drawing upon the Philippine approach to education and combining it with the American "feel good" approach. "I have observed that in America every child who participates in something gets an award. The teachers are careful not to tell one student they are better at something than another. In the Philippines, even when the children are young we rank the top three in the class and the top ten in the class and that is made very public.

"When I was in high school there were about five hundred boys and five hundred girls in my school and we were broken into classes of around fifty students each. The first section comprised the top academic scoring students of the entire high school. They were called Section One. On a downscale of grading follows the correspondingly numbered sections hereafter (this student

classification style has now changed and classes are now a mix of girls and boys). There are pros and cons to that, but in the Philippines then, they felt it encourages students to excel. Here in the US we don't do that and the educational system appears to be more concerned in avoiding to offend students who are less motivated to the expense of not acknowledging in public the more productive and most motivated students. That maybe part of the reason and so it may seem, that a lot of our best and more competitive scientists and doctors are foreign born."

Jade Sayson, even at her young age, recognizes the value of this approach. "My Dad expects me to do well and he helps me do it. Just recently, he helped me with my science project by giving me some really good ideas on how to improve my experiment. Even though he's really busy, he always makes time to go out with us on weekends. We do a lot of different things. He's always there to help me with my homework and he's always encouraging me and giving me inspiration. Sometimes when I'm not feeling well he will tell me things that make me feel better." Does this motivational approach really work for children? Jade for two years in a row was chosen to represent the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary school at the prestigious Illinois State Science Fair. Jade received the Gold award twice.

Sayson is known for his charity work and, like everything he does, Sayson gives his all. There are many ways to give, many ways to help. Some people donate money to worthy causes, some pitch in with the actual work and some connect directly with those individuals in need and make it their mission to change the lives of these people. Jojo Sayson does all three. One of the most dramatic examples of personalized involvement with individuals came through his sister-in-law, Julie. "My sister-in-law in the Philippines has a laundry lady who is very poor. She and her husband don't have a house and they live in a lean-to adjacent to Julie's house. It's a very small room, just enough for them to cram in together to sleep at night."

“This lady has an adopted son named Mark who was born from a different father who was also very poor and is now in prison. The result was that Mark was pretty much abandoned by his biological mother. Actually, I think he may have been given to them in exchange for money and the birth certificate was apparently doctored so that the laundry lady and her husband were listed as his parents when they are really not. When his biological mother gave baby Mark to the couple he was malnourished and his hair was falling out. They didn’t think he was going to survive. The laundry lady nursed Mark back to health.”

I met Mark in San Pedro, Laguna when he was 5 years when I visited Julie. When I first carried him in my arms, he clung to me like he knew me - I carried him and he was as close to me as if I were his long lost father. He started calling me “Daddy Jojo” and he would listen to me more than he would listen to anyone else.”

Each time Jojo returned to the Philippines his bond with Mark grew stronger. “Mark was growing up a fine boy, but he wasn’t very happy. Then I heard from someone that he was being physically abused by his stepfather. His style of discipline tormented little Mark. I had heard that the father was hitting him on the head, throwing him in the garbage heap by the polluted river, or leaving him behind in an unfamiliar street.”

“When I arrived back in the Philippines after I heard this, I told the stepfather I would like to speak to him one on one. I told him that what he had been doing to Mark as punishment was not the way to handle it. In a civilized manner, I scolded the man and I reminded him that I am connected with the military. Over there a military man can deliver the fear factor on a civilian.”

“I also told him that if he keeps hurting Mark one day the boy may retaliate because ‘hate’ is what he is teaching him. Already I could tell that Mark had an animosity towards the stepfather. I told the stepfather, ‘I do not want you to hurt Mark.

I do not want to hear about this anymore and if I do hear about it again, I will come after you.' I said 'I would like to shake your hand like a gentleman but you have to promise me that you will not hurt Mark anymore.' So he made that promise and to this date he has never hurt Mark again."

Whenever he returns to the Philippines, Jojo visits Mark, doing things with him that the boy has never experienced. He elaborated: "I took him on his first pony ride and to his first movie in a theater, things his step-parents could never afford to do. It would be just the two of us and he would go through the shopping malls riding high on my shoulders. We went on a picnic and he told me, 'Daddy Jojo, I have never been so happy in my life.' I would say that I love him and he would tell me that he loves me too. It is very difficult to leave because he will not let go of his hug and cries because he doesn't want me to leave."

Immigration laws prevent Jojo from bringing Mark to America. Even though they are separated by thousands of miles, Jojo has made a continual effort to connect with Mark and include him in the family. "I've made sure to talk to him on the phone. He was sleeping on a cardboard box and losing weight because they were so poor, so I told them that I would take care of the food for Mark and now he eats every day at my sister-in-law's house."

"He practically lives there. Her son is grown up already so Mark now sleeps there as well. He is gaining weight because I am sending money and food to Julie to feed him and some miscellaneous expenses. He sent me a drawing of stick figures of myself, Mommy Nancy, Jade, and him. Jade was holding Mommy's hand, Mommy was holding my hand and I was holding Mark's hand. It is heart wrenching because he's showing his desire and his belief that he is part of the family. This last Christmas we made a small album of photos of him with us so he has something to look at and show his friends that he has a family."

In April of 2008 the scientific paper that Sayson had written with Dr. Alan Hargens was published. It was selected as the lead article for Volume 79, Number 4 of, *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine* and presented a structured theory of the pathogenesis (disease development) of astronauts' back pain in microgravity. Based on Dr. Hargens' years of space research and the curriculum of the Ola Grimsby Institute, the authors hypothesized that the low back pain commonly experienced by astronauts in the weightless environment of space, is caused by disc expansion beyond the normal viscoelastic limits of Earth: decreased loading and resulting reduction of hydrostatic pressure in the disks in microgravity may result in increased disk size which may stimulate specialized nerve endings and give rise to pain. In medical terms this is described as "somatic" pain and it sometimes hinders the astronaut's ability to perform challenging tasks, and disrupts their sleep and subsequently their mental concentration.

Astronauts report that the "fetal tuck or cannonball position," with knees-to-chest, relieves their back pain. The article presents research and references to describe the possible reasons for this relief, their clinical consequences and the rationale of the numerous proposed exercise countermeasures suggested for astronauts to perform in space to increase spinal loading. (These countermeasures also may prevent herniated disks which can occur post-flight.) The authors also suggest the possibility of employing, in conjunction with the countermeasures, a harness designed by Sayson to stimulate spinal compression and reduce disc expansion.

With this one publication Jojo Sayson became established in the scientific community, and his work in this aspect of physical therapy is now used for reference by scientists worldwide. Even Alan Hargens was surprised by how well the paper was accepted. "It took us a long time to come up with a paper that could be

submitted for review,” Hargens recalled, “and then, even after we submitted it, I think we had to submit a few more revisions. It’s a difficult process but it was very well received. In fact, I was surprised how well-received it was.”

In his research Sayson found support in the studies of several different scientists and astronauts. “First,” he elaborated, “we needed to find out what the most likely cause of the back pain is. From what I could determine it seemed the intervertebral disk itself was the culprit. The biochemicals in the disk are described as “hydrophilic” - they attract, absorb, and retain water molecules in a closed system, like a tire under pressure. So, in its most simplistic form, the chemicals attract water more than they allow that water to return to circulation through the vertebral bones.”

“When we move around on Earth we are slowly squishing the water out of the disks, like wringing a wash cloth, until by the end of the day the disk is actually smaller or thinner. Then, when we sleep, it rehydrates. So fluids from the vertebrae are going into the disk with unloading at night and back out during the day when the spine is re-loaded. This fluid fluctuation means that the disk has a reduction of volume during the daytime and a higher volume at night when it’s rehydrating.”

“Now, in microgravity you don’t have that daytime compression equivalent. So, the disk behaves like it is in a non-stop sleeping environment and it attracts water. That means it grows and expands and there is no counter-pressure during the waking phase as it keeps on expanding. The spine can stretch to elongate, but there is a limit before it causes pain. When it’s over-stretched the collagen fibers may become structurally weak. That’s true with any kind of ligament when placed in prolonged deformed position.”

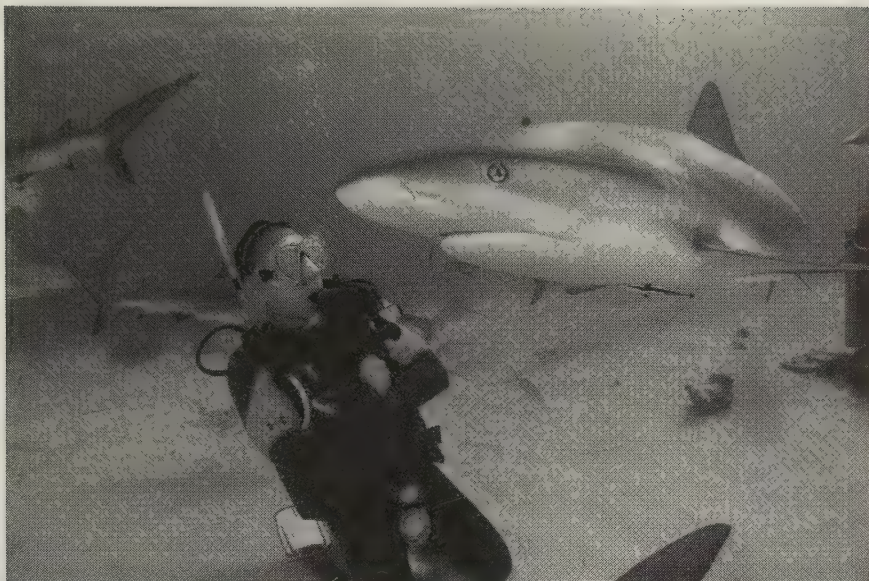
“That’s why with a sprained ankle, if you keep on spraining it the ligaments become too loose. So with the spinal disk in microgravity, its collagen fibers may become loose and stretched beyond the normal Earthly parameters. When the nerve fibers around

the disk circumference sense the deformation and certain chemical changes, it now becomes painful. When the astronaut compresses the disk with the cannonball position the fluids in the disk are returned and the disk resumes its natural shape. As a possible secondary effect, when you initially stretch the ligaments in the spine with this knee-to-chest position it stimulates a different set of nerve endings called ‘mechanoreceptors’ and produce a good feeling that happens in the spinal cord nerve circuitry.”

So, through prolonged perseverance, careful research, and consultation with established experts in the various fields involved, Jojo Sayson had helped in solving a problem that had plagued America’s astronauts since the beginning of space travel. “Dr. Hargens said having the article published was a real feather in my cap as a physical therapist, and it helped establish me as a NASA expert,” Jojo said with quiet pleasure.

On April 12, 2011, Sayson was a guest presenter on the subject of Back Pain Mechanisms in Space, addressing the Space Medicine and Operations Panel of the International Academy of Astronautics (IAA) at the 18th Humans in Space Symposium, in Houston, Texas. The day of his lecture was the 50th anniversary of the first manned spaceflight by Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. “Since I’ve gotten to know Jojo a little better I’ve realized how sincere and caring he is about other people,” Alan Hargens said. “Now here he was giving a talk on back pain in space to an audience that was well versed in space travel. I admit I was a little worried about it, but he did a marvelous job and it drew rave reviews from some of the program managers. I feel I’ve been fortunate to work with him. I’ve tried to be a good mentor in helping him become a respected scientist.”

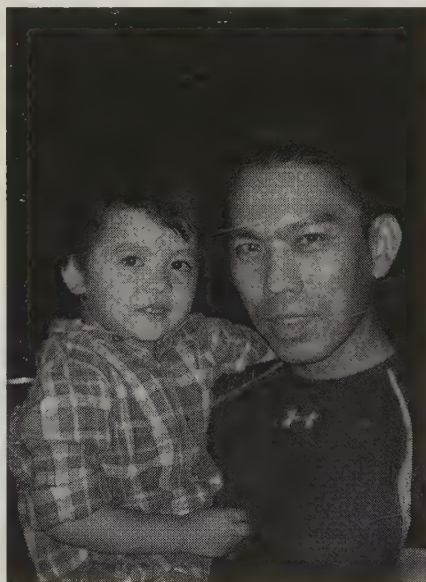
True to his nature, Sayson began to wonder what the next step in his relationship with NASA should be. It wasn’t long before he decided it was time for another boyhood dream to become reality. Jojo Sayson wanted to become an astronaut.



Shark feeding expedition in 2009 with over 40 reef sharks at Stuart Cove, Bahamas



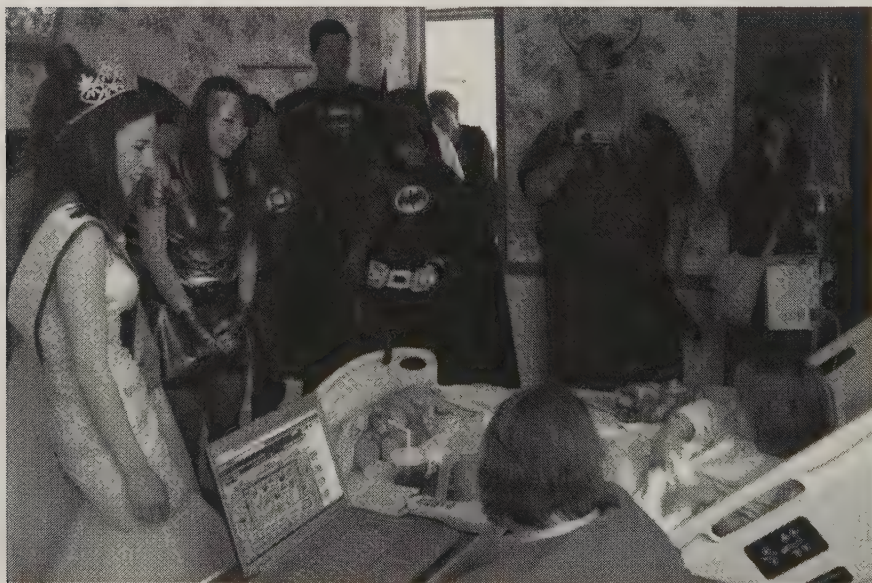
Historic final roll out of Space Shuttle Discovery at Cape Canaveral, Florida in 2010



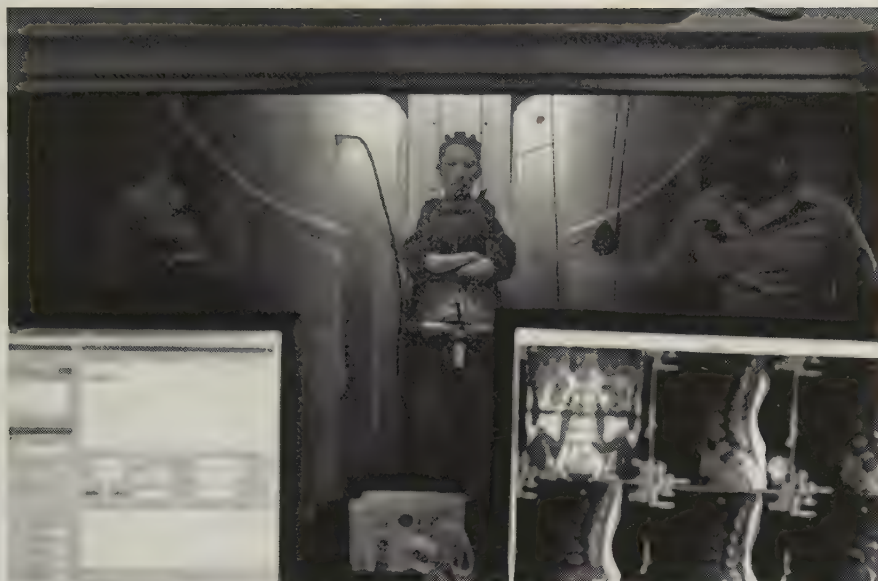
Meeting Mark for the first time in 2006 in the Philippines



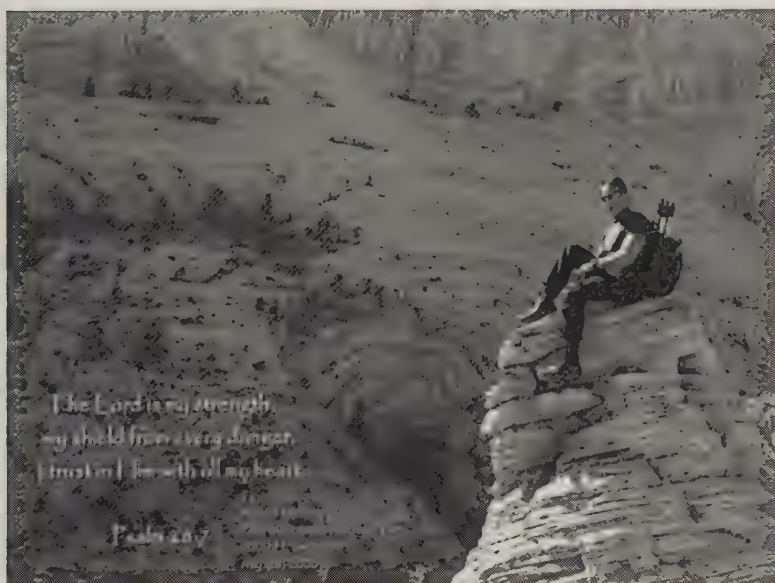
Representatives of the US Armed Forces with Lieut. Commander Jojo Sayson PCGA 103rd



Jojo as Batman with Miss United America Sherrie Gearheart and the Alliance of Superheroes USA visiting a sick child at St. Mary's hospital in Kankakee, Illinois



Jojo being scanned as a simulated astronaut supervised by Dr. Alan Hargens and observed by project scientists of the International Space Station in Houston, Texas



On top of Angels Peak Landing mountain at Zion Monument National Park, Utah
Photo taken by High School best friend John Talabis



Flying like Superman in a parabolic flight with Zero-G Corporation at 34,000 ft. over the Gulf of Mexico



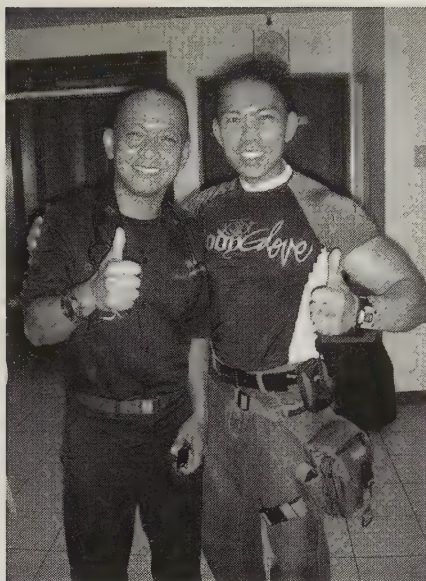
Flight Crew Member Contributing Status for the World War II B-17 Flying Fortress Aircraft, "Nine-O-Nine", July 27, 2005, 6:50 pm flight over Kankakee County, The Collings Foundation



'In Search of Angels' Hang glide at Enjoy Airfield in Chebanse, Illinois



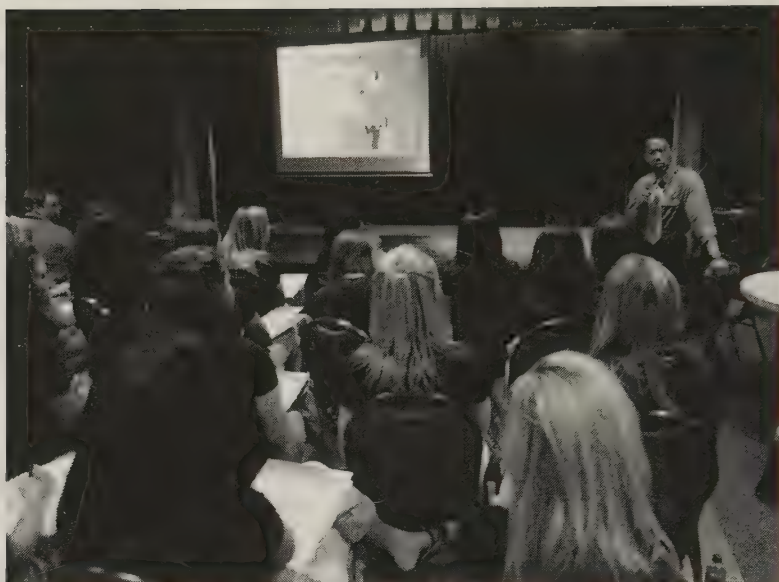
Finding Rochelle, a case of Progeria, in Bulacan, Philippines



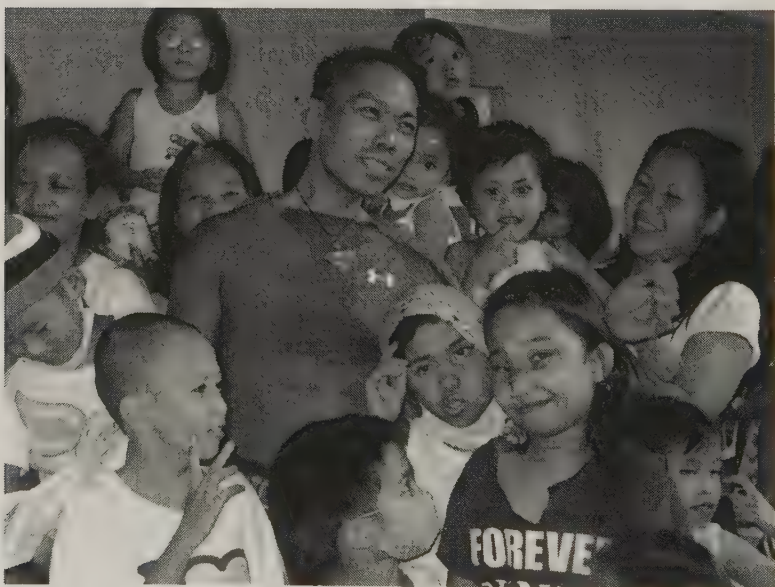
Meeting Doc Ted Esguerra for the first time at the Philippine Coast Guard Headquarters in Manila in 2008. Jojo recalls the feeling of finding a long lost brother



Television Interview with Pastor J live on Comcast cable TV on the discussion about God and Quantum Physics



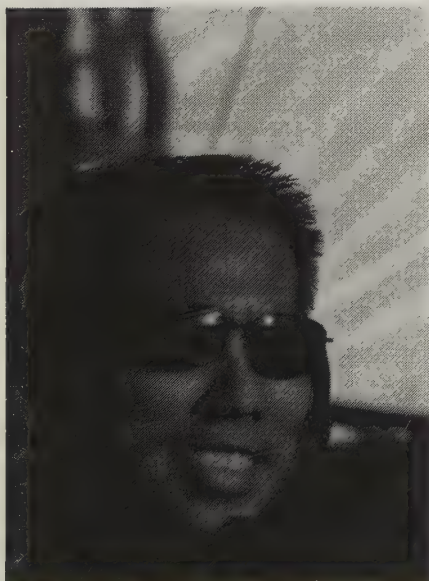
Human Factors in Motivation Seminar for the 26 regional titleholders competing for the Miss Illinois 2009 pageant



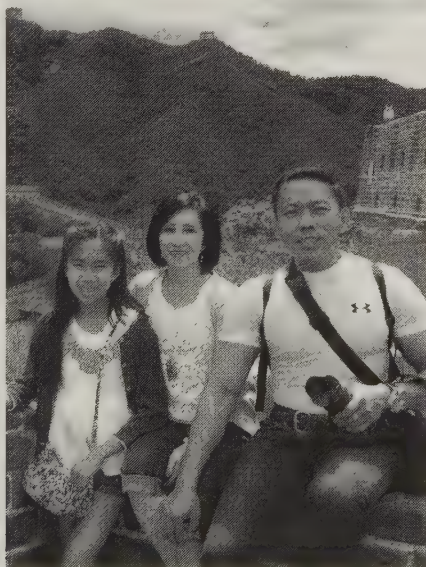
Super Jojo with the sick children of CHILD Haus, Philippines



From boyhood dreams in the Philippines to adulthood in the USA, Jojo as Batman with his Bathummer



Undoctored photo taken by newspaper photographer John Butterfield in which 'light rays' seem to emanate from Jojo



Sayson family vacation on the Great Wall of China 2012



Thank you banner for Jojo made by students and teachers of Jomalig Island, Quezon Province, Philippines after shipment of over 1,200 lbs of books to restock the public school library and delivered by the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary, 103rd Squadron in 2008

Chapter Nine

The Last Frontier

“Ad astra per aspera (to the stars
through difficulties)”
– Anonymous

In working with Dr. Hargens Jojo had met and interacted with several astronauts and liked the camaraderie he had developed with them. So for a person who sets no limits on his dreams or the faith and work he will put into achieving them, it was only natural for him to contact one of the astronauts and inquire about his chances of becoming one of them. He recounted: “Brian Duffy was a former Space Shuttle Commander who had flown the shuttle on four missions, and had actually helped build the International Space Station. I told him of my desire to become an astronaut and said that I was afraid my age would prevent the astronaut selection office from considering me. He told me that age is not a problem with NASA as long as they know you are fit and that you can provide the skills and aptitude that they know they need and don’t have yet.”

Jojo Sayson certainly was fit and certainly had skills that already had been proven to be assets NASA needed. So, when in November of 2007 his astronaut friend Astronaut Robert Springer emailed him that there was an opening for an astronaut candidate position, Jojo had been thinking about it and when he got that email he felt that it was a sign to go for it. Jojo was willing to make the sacrifices to be accepted. “One of the qualifications was having 20/20 vision and I wore glasses, so by November of that year I had gotten laser surgery, a procedure which is accepted by

NASA –now I’m 20/20 in my right eye and 20/15 in my left. And after I sent my application in I started swimming more because that was one of my weak points; you have to swim well over a good distance. I also started reading biographies of astronauts and that helped me understand what their lives were like and how it was for their families, and even how they think.”

He did not shrink from promoting his natural advantages: “I knew that because of the limits in the physical space of the craft they tend to favor smaller sized candidates, and I’m only 5’6” and weigh about 150 pounds. It costs the Space Shuttle approximately \$30,000 per pound to launch something in orbit, so the heavier an astronaut is the more expensive it becomes. “Also, there had never been a Filipino national in space and I thought that might help me as well. I put together some excellent references: besides Dr. Hargens, I had recommendations from high-ranking officials in the Philippine armed forces. And I even wrote a letter to the former Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to ask for a letter of recommendation (I never got a response from her though), which was handed to her personally by my friend, Dr. Rey-Matias who was then one of the Presidential personal physicians and head of one of the presidential committees. I gave it my best shot.”

“And then I started preparing mentally for what would happen if I got accepted. I decided I would keep ownership of my business and maintain my house in Illinois as well. I would just get a small apartment there and fly back to Chicago every other weekend instead of moving my whole family down to Houston, which would be difficult for them. I planned it all out just in case.” He submitted his application on June 18, 2008 –the day before his 45th birthday. NASA wrote back that he would be notified of the results within the next year. He says, “There were 3,535 applicants, and I figured I’d just wait and see what happened – see if I’d become an ‘Ascan.’ That’s astronaut lingo for an astronaut candidate.”

About a year later, Sayson had just returned from one of his humanitarian expeditions to the Philippines when he found a letter from NASA waiting for him. "I knew it was a rejection of my astronaut candidate application because I know that if you were accepted they will personally call you, offer you the position and tell you when to report for duty. I felt dejected. I didn't open the letter for a week because I didn't want to face it, but of course, sooner or later you have to face up to things that cause you pain if you are to continue to grow. The letter said that the position had been filled and the reason it gave was that they were looking for someone with a degree in physical sciences compared to the life sciences degrees that I have. At first I was a little disenchanted but then I remembered telling my friends that I was going to take a shot becoming an astronaut and that if I didn't make it I would at least feel good about having tried. If I had never tried I would have been miserable the rest of my life thinking what might have happened if I had applied."

His following through on his dream brought Jojo another benefit: the application process brought back sweet memories as a six-year old boy watching the live telecast of the moon landing on a grainy black and white television screen with his father back in 1969. "My father was enthralled by the fact that they landed men on the moon. We were just lowly people living on the island of Luzon watching it on television. As I completed the application, I kept thinking how my dad would feel if he only knew his son who watched that event with him would someday work with NASA, have astronaut friends and apply to become one himself."

While he was waiting to hear from NASA, Sayson would say that if he didn't get accepted into the astronaut corps he would be happy even if they allowed him just to wash and scrub the spaceship. But, as has happened so often in his life, Jojo's attitude led him to far more than that. "Not long after I got the letter from NASA, I got an e-mail from Dr. Hargens that said

he wanted me to be part of a scientific team he is assembling,” he recalled. “There’s a total of ten scientists who are some of the best minds in their fields in the entire world who have been recruited by Dr. Hargens to apply for a NASA grant on a special program to actually study Back pain in space. Almost all of them are doctors and I felt very honored to have been selected. Later on our scientific team would also include Astronaut Scott Parazynski.”

“Dr. Hargens called me and said he wanted me to write the background part of the proposal. That was wonderful to hear because although I’m the junior scientist the top scientist is telling me I’m the most qualified to write it! I had only one weekend to write it and it was the same weekend that I was a guest lecturer for the American Academy of Physical Therapy in the Bahamas. The mental demands were grueling but I was joyful so I did my very best!”

“This was an opportunity for me to become a NASA-funded scientist. If this proposal was approved we would have around \$1.5 million. We’ll be measuring several aspects of the astronauts’ spines before they blast off into space and measuring them again when they return after being in orbit for 180 days. After they land they’ll have to stay lying down until we can measure them again before their body begins re-adjusting back to Earth’s gravity so we can detect the changes that came about while in space.”

Alan Hargens further described the program: “We submitted a research proposal to NASA concerning studying back pain in space and we were able to get funded for it. We recently did a pilot study and Jojo was our subject. He volunteered to be our first Guinea pig. (I used to do that all the time). As good investigators you want to be the first experimental subject so you can work out all the details of the methodology on yourself before you go to naïve subjects or even astronauts.) Right now

we're finalizing our protocol and doing the final submission to the NASA Human Research Program Board and, assuming all goes well, we'll give our first briefing to one of the upcoming crews and ask them to sign the consent form. That will probably happen sometime in the fall of 2011."

"Then we'll get pre-flight data, imaging from MRI and MRS tests of the disks, and information on muscle strength. Then the astronauts will go up to the space station for about six months."

The astronauts will land in Russia, coming down in a capsule with a parachute which can be a rough landing. "They are retiring the American shuttle this year," Hargens continued, "so, in the near future, all of the space station astronauts will have to come down on Russian soil. Then our astronauts will go to Moscow and be put on an airplane. They'll probably fly nonstop from Moscow to Houston and will be asleep most of the way back."

"Then we get to study them on what is called R+1, which is the first day after they've been picked up from their landing. Again, they will be very sore and very weak, and so we'll be able to get good data. They are only allowed to be studied for four hours a day, so we have to do all our tests near NASA at Johnson Space Center. Beside Jojo and myself, there are eight other investigators and one of the main ones is Dr. Jeff Lotz, a world-renowned orthopedic biomechanics professor at the University of California at San Francisco."

Working as a scientist is another long-time dream of Jojo Sayson. It began when he was a child in the Philippines and he has nurtured it in his mind for many years. And now, like so many envisions in this remarkable man's life, it is becoming a reality. "I've always had a general interest in science but I prefer the kind of science that can more directly benefit humanity," he said. "I am especially interested in sciences as it applies to my work. To

use science together with competent skills training, bound together by critical thinking in my profession as an Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapist, is my true desire. I want to produce treatment that will help an ailment, or help the whole human being not just physically, but mentally, spiritually, morally, and socially as well.”

“The truth is, no matter what you do, some patients do not get better. I want to help them, all of them. I don’t want to just make money, I want to make a difference.”

Though he is excited about doing scientific work for NASA, Jojo has not yet given up on his dream to go into space. “I told astronaut Mike Mullane that NASA might own the astronaut corps, but they surely don’t own space and I’m going to go up there somehow! He said he liked that.”

In the Bahamas, Sayson’s mind was occupied with writing the NASA proposal and preparing for his lecture, and he felt himself growing more stressed. So he did what only Jojo Sayson would do to distract his mind from academic stress: He went swimming with over forty sharks!

He told the story: “It was Oct. 28, 2009 when I flew to the Bahamas. The lecture was Oct. 31 so on the 29th I went to Stuart Cove and signed up for a professional shark feeding expedition through an invitation from a marine photographer and colleague Bill Goodwin (his photographs had been featured in National Geographic magazine). I wanted to clear my mind and I knew something like that would do it. It can be terrifying. It was dangerous but beautifully exhilarating at the same time.”

“They only accept scuba divers who are professionally certified, not just by a hotel or a resort. I was professionally certified all right, but the last time I had made a dive was twenty years before so I was pretty rusty. They gave me a quick refresher course, and I knew I could do it. It’s basically freestyle and it worked.”

“It totally cleared my mind. The feeling of being underwater with seven to eight-foot long sharks swimming all around in the

splendor of nature just overwhelmed me. So much so that I actually knelt down on the sandy sea floor and said the Lord's Prayer. I wanted to give God glory for His magnificent creation."

Despite swimming with sharks and adventures with NASA, Jojo's mind was never very far from his first love – the practice of physical therapy. "I knew I had to change some things. I'd had three business partnerships and they had all failed. I realize that you have to be tough to succeed in business but I refuse to believe the idea that to succeed in business you have to be unethical. I know I'm not perfect, but I believe that honesty counts for a great deal more than success."

"I do believe there are very few things you will take with you when you die, but I think that one of them is your integrity. You leave your money, your reputation, your properties, your professional titles, and all but I am certain that you take your integrity with you. I also think you take along with you all the happy memories that you've ever had in this life. These are the things that you are going to show to the Creator when He asks you what you did with the life He gave you. Hopefully we will also take along our sense of humor. So we will be laughing up there like little children in a place many call heaven."

Sayson believes that integrity is something that speaks the truth and that people perceive in another person. He feels it's the most important aspect of his practice. "Patients sense integrity," he affirmed. "If someone has the professional training but they don't have the integrity, people can tell. Integrity is intangible but just as important for a physical therapist as having the intuition for healing, or touch."

"My patients come to me because of word of mouth. They know people who were treated in my professional practice. I refer new patients to inquire with previous ones sometimes about their experience doing business with me so they know what to expect. I'll put them in touch with someone who had a similar ailment

so they can find out how I approached it and how effective the treatment proved to be. I stand by my work.”

“In the United States physical therapy professional licensure is mostly geared to academics and less on the skills training. The examination to obtain a license to practice physical therapy is mostly a series of multiple choice questions. For example, there’s no ‘skills testing’ to determine if the professional applicant is able to find a particular joint and manually mobilize it the correct way, or accurately palpate an anatomical structure. I want to make myself the best because I want to serve humanity in God’s name. If you do that, you are being a productive servant by using the talents that have been given unto you.”

Chapter Ten

Preserving the Past

“Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look
back and realize they were the big things.”

— Robert Brault

As one might imagine, a person with as many and varied interests as Jojo Sayson, would have assembled quite a collection of memorabilia. Put together his fascination for comic books, superheroes, history and science with the vast array of souvenirs from his many adventures and the result is a large room full of interesting objects – a museum, in fact. The Jojo Sayson Museum occupies five hundred square feet in a somewhat modest home that Jojo, Nancy and Jade occupy in Bourbonnais, Illinois. “When I bought the house the basement was unfinished,” Jojo recalled, “so when we finished it I asked my wife if I could have part of it for my museum. I let her do what she wanted with the rest of the house and she lets me have that. I call it my “Fortress of Solitude” after Superman’s lair to get away from the hassles of the world always needing his help, but it’s also kind of a man cave.”

The museum is far more than that, however, as it contains a very interesting a wide variety of fascinating items. “There are no vents in that room,” Sayson pointed out. “Usually you will see things like artifacts and model ships in glass containers to keep the dust out. I made the whole room behave like a gigantic glass container. It has an electrostatic air filter that traps most of the dust particles.”

Sayson started putting his collection together when he first arrived in the Kankakee Area back in 1989. "I remember walking down an aisle at Toys-R-Us store and seeing a toy called Ultraman. It's a Japanese action figure and, when I looked at it, I thought how much I would have wanted that toy if I had seen it when I was a child in the Philippines because Ultraman was one of my favorites as a young boy. Then I thought, 'Wait a minute. That boy is still part of me.' So from then on, I decided I was going to collect the things I liked as a boy. As a child I wanted to buy all these toys but we couldn't afford them. So, now that I had the means to procure them my question to myself was, 'Why not now?' So that is how it started."

From that point on, Sayson began scouring toy stores, garage sales, catalogs, the Internet and wherever else he might find things that were representative of his childhood. "I started out," he related, "pretty much with Batman and Superman. My first love is really Superman."

Many of the pieces in the museum are from model kits that Sayson has assembled. "When I had time I built things like a 1/6 scale model of Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator," he noted. "I put them together and then I painstakingly hand painted them. I did the same with a Terminator T-800 endoskeleton, Conan the Barbarian, Batman and Robocop."

Also included is a model of the Apollo 11 Saturn V, the most powerful rocket ever built. "I have it because I really wanted to be part of the Astronaut Corps. That is one of my dreams."

In addition to the toys and models in the Sayson collection there are numerous photographs and autographs of famous people whom Sayson admires. "Many of these are from people you usually don't find easily or are deceased," Jojo said, "like the late Bob Kane, the creator of Batman. I sent him a letter with a picture of myself dressed as Batman back in 1996, when I formed the Alliance of Super Heroes to visit sick children. I autographed it

‘To Bob Kane from your Filipino Batman,’ and he sent me back a signed photo of himself with an original sketch of Batman as it appeared in his DC comic book in 1939!”

Also in the Batman part of the museum is a signed photo of Adam West in the costume he wore as television’s Batman in 1966 and there is a signed photo of the first movie Batman, Robert Lowery, as well as film’s first Robin, Johnny Duncan, from the 1930s and 1940s.

There is an extensive Star Wars and Star Trek collection in Sayson’s museum, including large toys like the AT-AT Snow Walker, a replica of the giant robotic vehicles that the Empire used to storm the rebel forces in the Star Wars Trilogy. “Most people feel lucky to have one of these,” Jojo said, “but I have found five of them by scouring the stores.” There stands as well a life-size R2-D2 robot Jojo won in an auction for another local fund raising event.

Also included is an autographed photo from David Prowse, who played Darth Vader in the Star Wars films whom Sayson met at a comic convention in Chicago in 1996. He met Lou Ferrigno, one of Jojo’s heroes who played the Incredible Hulk on TV, at the same event.

A significant part of the ‘Fortress of Solitude’ is devoted to history and includes a salvaged piece of coal from the Titanic, and to name a few, autographs from people like inventor Thomas Edison, Astronauts Neil Armstrong, John Glenn and Alan Sheppard, author and father of science fiction Jules Verne, oceanographer-explorer Jacques Cousteau, General Douglas McArthur, U.S. Admiral Chester Nimitz, George Dewey, who defeated the Spanish fleet in the Philippines, and American General Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the Enola Gay, the plane which dropped the Atomic bomb on Hiroshima. “I don’t have enough room to hang all the important autographs that I have,” Jojo reported. “I still have boxes of them waiting for space so I can display them.”

There are many other heroes represented in the museum including U.S. Lieutenant General James Gavin who was known for standing and fighting with his men behind enemy lines in WWII, and Carlos Romulo, a general in the Philippine army when the United States was forced to pull out during World War II. Jojo elaborated: "He was the Vice President of the Philippine Commonwealth government in-exile when the Japanese invaded and then President Manuel Quezon who died from tuberculosis and Romulo became the president. He was president when the Philippines became a charter member of the United Nations in 1945."

Also in this section of the museum are photos of Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero for whom Jojo is named after by his grandfather Pedro. Sayson has a "Kris," a sword that belonged to a chieftain in the island of Mindanao, Philippines four hundred years ago. The handle is made of elephant tusk. "It came from an area where there was a lot of fighting," he noted, "so it was probably used in a battle."

Since Sayson's favorite Superhero is Superman, it's no surprise that there are several items related to the Man of Steel in the Fortress, including a commissioned oil painting of Jojo as Superman. "The story of this piece is that Mary Fisher was a student of Boris Vallejo of California, the artist who has done so many well-known fantasy paintings, and I hired her to paint me as Superman holding a bolt of lightning."

"I also sent a letter and a photo of Superman to Christopher Reeve. He returned it signed 'To Jojo, Yours, Christopher Reeve.' Right after I received it, he had the horrible accident which led to his paralysis and subsequent death in 2004."

"I also have a Superman picture signed by Jerry Siegel, one of the co-creators of Superman."

One corner of the room relates more to natural history where Jojo has gathered plaster replicas of footprints that

are reputed to come from creatures, such as Bigfoot and the Abominable Snowman. Next to them he has placed a model of The Incredible Hulk.

He also has on exhibit some meteorites, and samples from the Moon and Mars as well as some large preserved tropical insects. "I bought the insects," he revealed, "from the man who used to supply the Chicago Museum of Natural History. I met him at one of those weekend flea markets at the mall and I got preserved samples of the largest grasshoppers, the only poisonous species of wasp, and the black widow-maker spider, which was named by the wives of the men picking bananas because it jumps from the banana plants onto the workers and kills them."

Just as his life is a mixture of scientific reality (such as NASA and physical therapy) and his fascination for fantasy (such as the Alliance of Superheroes), Sayson's museum passes easily from fact to fiction and from history to fantasy. Included in the latter is a framed photo and signature of Jules Verne, the father of science fiction. There is also an autographed picture of the William Anderson, captain of the U.S. atomic submarine Nautilus standing next to the vessel. "This is an example of vision becoming reality," Jojo maintained. "Jules Verne in the 1800's had the vision of a steel submarine he called the Nautilus in his book 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea and by the turn of the century later it became reality." Jojo's science fiction fantasy also includes H.G. Wells' "Time Travel" symbolized by autographed photos of actors Rod Taylor and Guy Pearce who played the movie characters of the passionate professor A. Hartdegen, a name reminiscent of his NASA hero professor A. Hargens.

Another example of this concept on display is a model of a Hummer H2 truck, which Sayson bought long before he purchased the real thing. Once again the vision was followed by the reality.

Nearby is an early prototype of a United States Army biological suit which resembles a spacesuit. "Someone was getting rid of it and I found it on ebay," Jojo said. "It was before ebay was widely used so I got a pretty good deal on it."

The museum also contains many elaborate and intricate models of hand-built wooden 'man-o-war' type ships. "Ships are symbolic for me," Jojo explained with a faraway look in his eye. "To me they represent the voyage through life, the search for knowledge and the romance of the adventures of just finding what's out there. And I love detail. I saw one of these models in a store and I just loved all the detail so I got the name of the man who made it. He was Weldon Bonvallet, a WWII veteran who lived in Kankakee. I wound up buying several scale model ships from him including the historic USS Constitution and the HMS Victory. I became his friend and we went to movies together sometimes."

"I had him build me a fleet of ships. I have 47 that he built for me using the same plank on bulkhead construction that was used in real shipbuilding. It takes hundreds of hours to make them. Eventually, the aging Weldon couldn't do it anymore and had to move into the Illinois Veteran's home in Manteno, Illinois. I used to visit him there together with other WWII and Korean war veterans until he passed away. I think of these ships as his legacy. I never get tired of looking at them. They are all historically accurate. There's one called 'Sovereign of the Seas', which was a famous 17th Century British warship considered unsinkable then. It won every battle it was in for the British Navy. Then one day in port a cook left a candle unattended and the whole ship burned to the waterline."

Sayson's museum is very personal as well, containing photos of his parents and family, medals he won in elementary and high school, and a photo of Patrick Singh, a friend's 10 year old son who passed away. "He died a few years ago," Jojo said

sadly, “and since then I’ve felt the pain that his father Prit, my old friend from high school has had to endure. I brought this picture with me when I climbed down the Grand Canyon and I told Prit, that I was offering the hardship of the climb up for his son in Heaven.”

Sayson also has mounted photos of Ola Grimsby, his mentor, teacher, and friend. “He’s Norwegian,” Jojo noted, “and comes from a long line of Vikings, all the way back to around 1,000 B.C. The very first Ola Grimsby was a Viking king and in every generation there is an Ola Grimsby, and that’s his son’s name as well so the tradition carries on from the ancient times.”

Sayson has displayed a reproduction of a remarkable ink drawing of Jesus Christ, in which the lines in the drawing are all Bible verses. It was done by a Filipino in the first quarter of the 20th century. Sayson also exhibited some souvenirs from the Holy Land, including gravel from where Jesus walked and water from the source of the river Jordan, in which Jesus was baptized. “One of my rituals is to remind myself that I have to be humble in front of God. So I have an image of Jesus Christ up there on the wall and in my clinic I have a Santo Niño, the child Jesus Christ. Every time I pass them I kneel. I’m not worshiping the picture or the porcelain statue. I’m worshipping what they represent. I physically kneel and make the sign of the cross to remind myself to be humble.”

There again is one of the many interesting paradoxes about Jojo Sayson. He builds a museum which some say is valued over a hundred thousand dollars, but makes sure that it contains a solid reminder of the need to be humble.

Chapter Eleven

Maintaining Balance

“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator
for all I have not seen”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

In 2010 Jojo intensified his philanthropic efforts for C.H.I.L.D. Haus. “Most of the children,” he noted, “suffering from cancer who receive public or government services live in the far islands where the people are very poor. Ricky Reyes is a celebrity in the Philippines who first recognized that when the parents from these provinces bring their children in for treatment they don’t have a place to stay and end up sleeping on the sidewalks so he founded C.H.I.L.D. Haus. “It is supported by the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office, a few private companies, and people like myself and some of my best friends from the University of Santo Tomas High School Batch 1980 Alumni Association. We all found each other through the Internet. I was the vice-president for two years and served as a member of the board of trustees.”

One of Sayson’s dreams is to build an elementary school for poor children in the Philippines through his position as Lieutenant Commander of the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary. He has produced several fundraisers for the school project in Zambales, Philippines including a 1940s Mabuhay Dinner Party and a Roaring 20s Theme Party, both in Kankakee, Illinois. Some performers at these events have been beauty pageant titleholders who have been participants in Jojo’s motivational seminars such as Miss America contenders Ashley Hatfield (Miss Illinois 2007)

and Katie Lorenz (Miss Illinois 2009), and Toni Hassett (Mrs. Kankakee County and Third Runner Up for Mrs. Illinois, both in 2010) as well as a dance team from Starlight Dance Academy and Sayson himself.

As a performer Jojo is totally committed. Whether singing a Frank Sinatra ballad at one of the fundraisers, fronting a troupe of twenty-four female dancers as the lead male tap dancer in a rendition of Riverdance, or playing the singing witch doctor (“Put the Lime in the Coconut”) in his daughter’s dance recital, he gives his all.

He gives his all in rehearsal, working as hard and as long as it takes and then, on the night of the performance, he somehow reaches down and finds that extra something to give even more. His charisma is enormous and may be only matched by his precision and his desire to entertain. In the end it is the audience who benefits most because every Jojo Sayson performance is a memorable one.

A common question concerning Jojo Sayson is how he can not only be involved in so many different types of endeavors, but do so many of them exceedingly well. “Many people are involved in lots of things,” he said. “I think the difference might be that I try to do each thing I’m involved in to the absolute best of my abilities and silently offer the effort to God. And then I continually strive to improve on that. If I going to dance, I’m going to take lessons until I can dance well. And once I dance well, I’m going to try new things in the area of dancing that push me further and make me an even better dancer. It’s the same with everything I do - with my work and with my family of course, but also with singing, helping children, exercise, charity work, whatever.”

Dr. Ted Esguerra elaborated. “Jojo Sayson is a man of arts, being a very good writer and an astounding speaker. He can formulate original anecdotes. He dances and has strong cultural

influence. He is a man of science, plying through the purity of measurements, particularly space medicine and flight medicine. He is a man of philosophy, with the ability to put deeper thoughts into actions and reality. He is a man of Faith, emphasizing the greatness of God and his words are often laced with heavenly stanzas, giving encouragement to his ailing surroundings. He is a man of the physical agility, being extra fit, strong and swift, and he has a high reverence for wellness. These are the attributes of a renaissance man in its ideal sense.”

Sayson says this aspect of his life can be diagrammed. “If I represent myself as a dot in the center of a blank page and I draw lines out from that center like the radius of a circle I can label each line as an area of interest in my life. Maybe I label the first line “God,” and that has to do with spiritual things. Another line is labeled “family,” and there are lines for “work,” “education,” “humanitarian efforts,” “art,” “singing,” “dancing,” “health” and so on. These are the things that matter most in my life.”

“Each line is a value that I want in my life. Then I make a mark indicating where I feel I am currently in this effort. If I feel very fulfilled in an area I make the mark farther out from the center but if it is an area that I need to do more in, then I make the mark closer in to the center.”

“Then I connect the dots. If I end up with something like a polygon then my life is not balanced. If I am in balance in all these important areas, then when I connect the dots it will make a circle. It’s a way for me to determine which areas in my life need more of my attention. It’s your sense of fulfillment that matters, not how much time you spend but how satisfied you are with your effort. For example, if I see that I’m putting in too much time on and getting too much fulfillment from my studies and not enough with and from my wife then I’ll adjust my efforts.”

Sayson says he also employs one of Confucius' principles, that whatever one does at any one particular moment, make it the most important thing in one's life for that moment. "So if I'm holding my daughter Jade, then holding my daughter is what I think about. That is the most important thing in my life for that moment and nothing else matters. If I'm doing an interview then that is the most important thing in my life for that moment. If you think that way you will give your best effort in each thing you do and that enables you to do many things well."

Sayson sees this approach to time management as one of the keys to his success. Another key is the phenomenon of "entrainment," which has to do with attracting success. Jojo elaborated. "Scientifically, it can be explained within the confines of the laws of physics. If you suspend swing both a large pendulum and a small pendulum asynchronously in an empty and quiet room, before long the smaller pendulum will change its tempo and synchronize with the larger pendulum. The stronger force will take over the weaker one. In other words, the smaller pendulum will resonate with the larger one."

"The same thing happens if someone walks into a room very angry. Before long, their anger will affect everyone in the room even if they don't say or do anything. It's about the power resonance. We somehow start getting affected in the same vibes as the stronger emotion. Einstein describes space and time as a continuum, a fabric that is made of the intertwining of the two. Our standard for time is based on the Earth's gravity and a spacecraft orbiting the Earth does not experience the same sense of time the farther away from Earth. When Astronaut John Glenn came out of the his capsule after orbiting the Earth his watch which was synchronized pre-launch with the atomic clock was actually running a little later upon his return."

"Any physical object with enough mass in the space-time fabric distorts everything else a little bit and that is how gravity

is explained. I believe that we exist and are enmeshed within a fabric of unlimited possibilities. Like Einstein's model of the space-time continuum. Our minds have the passion to gravitate anything towards us – anything that we can conceive. If I generate an attitude that I will be successful I will attract success toward myself in a real phenomenon partly explained based on theoretical physics especially in the weird sub-atomic world of Quantum Mechanics."

The principle works in a variety of ways from getting the answer to a problem one has been focusing on to drawing the right people or resources necessary to grow in the direction one has been projecting. "I call it the art of knowing," Sayson said. "For example, I was in Barnes and Noble bookstore and I came across this pile of books. I seemed to have been called to it. When you begin to understand and follow these principles you are able to sense when you're being drawn to something and you just have to go with the flow. I went to that pile of books and there was one in the middle that somehow I just kind of gravitated towards. It was about the Divine Matrix, by Gregg Braden, of possibilities and discussed how God has provided us with an unseen medium where we become co-creators in this universe. It provided explanations for this phenomenon in line with quantum mechanics. It was just the book I needed at that stage of my thinking. I called out for information and I gravitated towards it."

Sayson continues, "Another example of that for me is my path to working with NASA. I have now become an official NASA Research Scientist. Now, when I was asked to join based upon my specialty, were there other better qualified people besides me who could have done this job? The answer to that is probably yes, but then again I sent the message out there into God's matrix of possibilities also described as the Divine Matrix that I wanted to become an astronaut. And because

of the law of attraction, while I wasn't called for that Ascan (astronaut candidate) position, things worked out so that I am now connected with NASA. I work with the space program, just like I wanted and called out for, and I work with the astronauts and scientists that are part of that program, just like I wanted and called out for. Some people might call this falling into place coincidence, but I don't because it happens on a regular basis."

Sayson believes that some of these events were set in motion from the dreams and ambitions of his childhood; "As a child of ten, when I was asked what I wanted to become I answered 'An astronaut, a scientist and a doctor.' Those were the three things I said, usually all of them together. Those were my answers and now, in a very real way, almost all of that has happened."

An example of this dreams coming true phenomenon is Sayson's marriage to Nancy. "When I was a young boy I remember talking to God and saying that I knew my future wife is alive and out there somewhere. I remember saying that I was going to marry someone who was Japanese. Later, In 1995, I married Nancy Islan who looks very Japanese and whose great grandmother was pure Japanese." He quips as well, "Many years ago, I bought this G.I. Joe action figure of Astronaut Robert Crippen, the first pilot of the Space Shuttle STS-1 mission. Then in April 2011, I would meet Capt. Robert Crippen in person during the 50th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight where both of us were invited speakers for the International Academy of Astronautics' 18th Humans in Space symposium in Houston, Texas."

"Another example is that sometimes I bump into a person who needs something that I know I can provide. Or I will read something in the newspaper and it clicks with me that I should be involved with it. I don't always act on this interest immediately but I pay attention to it. I let it ferment in my mind while I wait

for some kind of affirmation. I'm not looking for a rational reason but another sign. The spiritual realm is not always scientific. That is why God does not have a place in science, because there is no mathematical variable we can use to measure and quantify God." The Bible teaches in Matthew 25:21 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'" and this principle certainly applies to Jojo Sayson when it comes to listening for God to direct him to help others. "Sometimes, actually often, I come across people who seem to need to hear some of the things that I have learned. It always seems to have a sense of fate connected to it because the timing is so utterly perfect."

"Recently I was in the Philippines and wound up talking to RJ Martinez, a very pleasant guest relations officer who worked at the hotel where I was staying. She was having some personal difficulties and we went to a restaurant with her co-worker and I brought my computer and showed them my motivational power point presentation. They were so amazed at the technology, the scriptures and the mental methodologies."

"They had been very sad and now there was a new light in their minds and their energy levels were up. But there was something missing and they said they just wished Jasmine, one of their co-workers, was there, because she really needed to hear this. We were at the mall and we left the restaurant and started walking around. Within a short while we bumped into Jasmine. They didn't realize that they had sent a message out there into the matrix of possibilities to attract Jasmine to them. And there she was, just walking around in the mall. Then she went with us and we talked to her. This occurred within minutes of them wanting to see her. If things like this only happened once or twice, it might be coincidence, but it happens all the time."

It is no coincidence that Jojo would visit Sally Sioson to stay as a guest in her house in Orlando, Florida. Sally says she has seen a loving side of Jojo many times in his loyalty to friends: “He was here in Orlando for the launch of Space Shuttle Discovery at Cape Canaveral. He said he would call me from the Cape if Discovery was going to launch and ask me to buy him a return flight to Chicago. He only bought a one way ticket because the time before he came over the launch didn’t happen and he missed his flight. So I said okay and the launch went on and he called and said it’s a go, so please buy me a return ticket for tomorrow.”

“So I went online and started looking for tickets and I said ‘Jojo, if you leave in the morning instead of the afternoon you’ll save a hundred dollars.’ Do you know what the man told me? ‘Sally, how many times do I come to Florida? I’d rather spend that time with you.’ He would spend the extra money so he could stay and just talk. And then I spoke to him on the phone when he got back and he said it was worth \$100 to spend the extra time.”

Sometimes, as Sally can testify, the spiritual side of Jojo Sayson is the thing that helps his friends get through the traumas of life. “In early February of 2011, I found a lump in my left breast and I didn’t know what it was,” she recalled. “I didn’t call Jojo and tell him because I was drawn to self-pity. I was scared and crying all the time until my biopsy was scheduled. Then one day he called and left me a message saying he just wanted to see how I was doing. The next day I called him back and he was just boarding a jet on his way to lecture in South Korea.”

“I told him I had something to tell him. He stopped and listened to me and he said ‘That’s probably the reason I was thinking about you yesterday.’ I asked him to pray for me because my biopsy was coming Tuesday and he said, ‘Sally, I

can feel it. You're fine.' And I said you're just trying to make me feel better. And he said, 'No. I can feel it. You're fine.' I said, 'I know you're so positive, Jojo, but just pray for me.'"

"Then he sent me a message on Facebook: 'Believe and know you are always in my prayers.' He is the only man I know who would do that and stay with you. The biopsy showed the lump was benign and he was the first one I told about the result and he said, 'I knew God would not leave you.' That's the kind of encouraging friend he is to me."

This story also illustrates Sayson's belief that there is an attraction in the universe which connects people who are in need. "I think this is an aspect of God," he asserted. "If you are open to it, then God will use you that way. For example, one night I suddenly had an urge to send a text message to Muslim friend, Pinky, a flight attendant I knew was living in Saudi Arabia. Then later, I found out that she was crying at the time and needed someone to talk to. I answered the call to act on a divine instinct because I have made myself available to hearing it. Another example was one time someone sent me a text message when they were in trouble emotionally and the few words that came to me turned out to mean something very important to them. It's taken a lot of time and a lot of saying yes to that universal call, but I've become more aware of when to take action and what to say and do. There have been a few errors here and there, most of the time the feeling is correct." This, Sayson describes is what he calls the 'Art of Knowing'.

The first key to developing this kind of perception in the 'Art of Knowing' is to learn to trust it, to have faith that it will lead you correctly. "When you want to be receptive to the Divine Matrix of Possibilities," Jojo maintained, "you have to let go of doubt. The moment you start applying logic and rational reasoning - trying to make "sense" out of it - then it doesn't work because you've cluttered the process with doubt.

To believe in this you must first believe in an all-knowing intelligent and omniscient God, because He is pretty much the source of everything. Just as you cannot acknowledge pottery without acknowledging the potter, you have to acknowledge with humility that we are subservient to that infinite intelligence. That's the first rule."

The second key is to not get bogged down in trying to explain the process. Surrender: "You have to let go of anything that involves trying to define the process in a rational or scientific way because it is so far beyond our ability to understand. I'm sure there is a scientific process involved because God created human intelligence that created science and He uses it, but it's not something we can understand at this moment in humanity's spiritual development. So you use mental imagery - I imagine myself hanging on a limb that is sticking out of a cliff. I'm just hanging. That's a good representation because we think we can't let go of whatever we're clinging to because we're afraid we're going to fall and die. Our first instinct is self-preservation. So I visualize myself holding onto that limb and just letting go. Because when you think you have fallen, you soon will realize that you are flying."

When we become open to listen for God's direction and obey it, Sayson believes, "We link with God, the Creator; we become co-creators. I send out my own desire to create in the form of a passionate vision I have of myself, but when you send out something like this it cannot be selfish, it cannot be something that will just benefit you and no one else. It has to be a form of creation that benefits humanity. For me, it was not just the idea of being involved with the space program, but also helping develop ideas for safety of future astronauts. There has to be a purpose beyond just what you want and you have to believe in that purpose with all your heart. When I send an intention out into the universe, I know something is coming back. It's like an echo some call karma. I call it the Divine Echo."

“But you have to be prepared because it will come back to you in the form of hints like for me, hearing that there’s an opening for an astronaut candidate position or a NASA scientist calls, or suddenly you get an idea of how you could work with a NASA scientist. You surrender to go with that flow. You have to recognize the echo and when the moment comes and you do, you have to ride that flow. When there is something God wants you to do it will somehow just feel right, joyful, without internal conflict, and when that feeling comes it means that you’re into that flow. There is something wonderfully good about it. It feels that it is supposed to be there. It’s like riding the Divine wind.” Sayson feels particularly led by God in his philanthropic works such as the Tagalpul-an library and C.H.I.L.D. Haus. “These are the times,” he said with quiet passion, “that I literally knelt down, threw my arms up in the air and said ‘Lord, I surrender. I’m not fighting You. Use me as an instrument.’ And then wonderful things would happen like the television show in the Philippines and the connections with my high school alumni association and the Coast Guard Auxiliary – things that help me get the work done. We are all stewards. We need to understand how God loves us and realize that He gives us the opportunity to be like Him.”

Dr. Ted Esguerra spoke of the great need the Philippines has for men like Jojo Sayson: “My country has lots of problems. Jojo felt the condition and has done extensive works of donating books and building libraries to marginalized and poverty-stricken people. He encourages government leaders in the Philippines through his motivational speaking engagements so that they may become responsible citizens. He ‘walks the talk’ with all his attributes; translating them into a vivid cause on helping humanity, protecting the environment, and re-establishing strong faith to God.”

“I am deeply honored to have known him. He reaffirms that my country has still retained some resilient characters

derived from our great ancestors because the DNAs of intellectual pursuit, physical strength, and deeper convictions to God are running in Jojo Sayson's veins."

Sayson sees God's hand in many situations and believes that the Creator is very much at work in our lives. "Whenever I encounter people that I know I am to help, I feel that God has paved the way for me to meet and help them at that moment in time. They may have asked God for help recently or it may be that God anticipated their need long before I was even born. Or even, perhaps, I met them in Heaven before either of us were born and I promised them that I would be there at a certain point in time and we would rendezvous in life. In any case, I have a sense that the meeting was pre-arranged - it's somewhere between imagining something that is unreal and acknowledging something that is really real."

Jojo believes that helping others is more than doing good works: it's fulfilling a Biblical calling. He cited Matthew 25:40: "Jesus said, 'whatsoever you do the least of my brothers, you do unto me.' So if I visit a sick child dressed as a superhero, I've touched his life, and the good that was given goes out and multiplies because that child in turn touches others, and the effect is like the gentle and ever expanding waves created when you throw a pebble into a quiet pond."

In March of 2010, Sayson traveled to the Philippines to personally deliver the large amount of monies he had raised in the States for the task given him by an Admiral from his unit of building a school in Zambales. He came back as a superhero at C.H.I.L.D. Haus and of course to visit a seven-year-old boy who thinks of him as a father. "We would love to adopt Mark," he said with frustration, "but the Philippine international adoption laws are too stringent and ridiculously expensive for me to do it. But he is very dear to us. My wife and I tried to have another child - and of course, I would have wanted a boy for a second child."

“And one time I had a vision in my mind of a little girl crying in my sunroom because she wanted something. It wasn’t tears of real sadness but more of a playful kind of thing. But it made me think that I would not want my little girl to be by herself and it would be nice for her to have a brother. So I prayed that God would give Jade a brother. Nancy and I tried and nothing really happened and then Mark came along. So I think of him as my child even though he is not my biological child. He’s a child of God who was handed over to me to care for now.”

Chapter Twelve

On The Springboard

“It is your decisions, and not your conditions,
that determine your destiny”

— Anthony Robbins

As a motivational speaker, few can compare to Jojo Sayson. He is effective because he so strongly believes in what he is teaching. He has taken the key principles of his life and incorporated them into a motivational program that has real substance. Often, one hears a motivational speaker who excites them at the time, but the next day finds them empty because there was no solid plan to implement changes in life. Passionate words are fine, but if one cannot apply such passion to their life, then they are not really that much better off than they were before they heard the speaker.

Jojo’s talk centers on step-by-step plans that can change the lives of his audience if they will follow his plan. He excites but he also conveys real knowledge and a course of action.

Sayson calls his motivational talk Human Factors in Motivation with an Introduction to Empowerment, and he has presented it to the Philippine Coast Guard and Air Force, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority in the Philippines (TESDA), CEO’s of large companies, the clergy, the Miss Illinois Contestants and many other distinguished groups as well as countless schools and other organizations. He has also combined this instruction with his exercise principles and techniques to help train many beauty queens of the Miss Illinois/Miss America Organization, figure and bikini competitors and

bodybuilders of the North American Natural Bodybuilding Federation (NANBF). One beauty pageant winner whom Sayson has coached is Sherrie Gearheart. "I started with Jojo in 2009," she recalled, "at a Miss Illinois motivational seminar that he was giving. I was one of the contestants and when I heard all the scientific elements he had applied to motivation, I was really inspired. I really wanted to get to know him."

"I don't know if you would call it fate or what, but a month later I tore a ligament in my ankle a week before competition. So, as a physical therapist he greatly helped me with my ankle and we just really connected. He's such a great person. He has a great soul and much has grown out of our friendship. Not only has he inspired me but he has enabled me to inspire others."

Sherrie Gearheart is the founder of Tiara Magazine and the Live-Out-Loud charity and helps many young women. "Jojo has helped me help others," she related, "and we've done a lot of non-profit events for good causes and a lot of other kinds of charity work together. He has influenced me to be a positive person. It is so easy to become negative in this crazy world but you have to be positive if you're going to get anywhere, and especially if you're going to help other people. Jojo lives this way and he's very uplifting to be around."

Gearheart says that one of the qualities that make Jojo Sayson stand out is his compassion for others: "His giving nature is amazing. He is a deep thinker, very intellectual, but at the same time very compassionate. There's a lot of things that go into a beauty competition that can really bring you down so when I'm competing I will call Jojo just to talk."

"I've won competitions and I've lost competitions, but one time I had just lost one and I had only three weeks to prepare for a national competition so I called him to help get my spirits up. And he really, really listened, and steered me in the right direction. I ended up winning the competition and it was just incredible! He

was actually the very first person I called when I won because he had such a big impact on me.” Sherrie Gearheart became Miss United America in 2011 and founded Live-Out-Loud Charity, a non-profit organization to help prevent suicide.

Sayson says that the key to benefitting from a motivational talk is to be open to the possibilities of life. ”Most people want a comfortable life and they don’t want to move out and leave their comfort zone,” he stated. “We know how much money is coming in and how much is going out and we don’t want that disturbed. If you ask people to go to the edge, they would not and be afraid. They will say ‘I can’t do it’ and give you all kinds of excuses. But remember, sometimes if you step off the edge you won’t fall - you will actually fly.”

Part of Sayson’s approach has to do with learning to maximize the time we have available. He sees the big picture: “The world that we know exists in three dimensions - height, width and depth. According to Einstein time is the fourth dimension. Time is ticking away and it’s not stopping. Everyone has the exact same amount of time given to them every day. So it’s all about how we use the time we have. If I gave you a book and said to report about it in a year you would not have much motivation. But if I gave you a book and ask you to read it and report on it tomorrow, you’ll be motivated because you’re pressed for time.”

“We sometimes wonder how a person can do all the things he or she does. It’s because that person is managing their time. There is a secret which is the very foundation to managing time. Focus on what you’re doing and do it as well as you can. But that’s not what most people do. When most people work they are not concentrating on work, but thinking of so many other things at the same time. For most people, whatever job they are doing is done half heartedly and therefore ends up taking more time to accomplish.”

So Jojo tries not to allow worries, fears or doubts to take up

his mental energy. Instead he focuses intently on the task at hand. For example: "If I'm speaking to an audience of people and you ask me what the most important thing in my life is at that moment, I will say it's the audience who is listening to me. And when I'm hugging my daughter I will give her 110% of my attention because that is the most important thing in my life at that minute. It's a very simple concept - whatever you're doing, let that be the most important thing at that moment. Even if you just happen to be resting or sitting still. Psalm 46:10 says 'Be still and know that I am God.' There is beauty in the quietude of every moment."

Sayson feels that the desire to fellowship with others and the desire to be significant are built into us by the Creator. "Every human being has a soul created by God," he maintained. "We exist not for ourselves alone but for others through fellowship. That's why people socialize to go to parties, have friends, or even connect on the Internet through all sorts of social media like Facebook for example. People are social beings, but everyone has an inherent need to feel significant. There are no exceptions to this rule. People want to be successful because that would give them the respect of others. Conversely, if you're going to effectively connect with people you need to make sure you respect them. A practical reminder is to visualize that everyone you meet is carrying a little sign that only you can read which says 'I am important.' Everyone has that sign - no exceptions. If you ignore that sign you will step on the person's well-being and the relationship will begin to crumble."

If people cannot achieve some sense of significance in a positive manner, they will often turn to the negative to attain it. "That's why there are criminals. Let's say I'm a person without any kind of achievement in life to feel significant and I meet someone who is very successful. I would not be significant to them and that would make me feel bad. But if I had a knife and I threatened them, then I would be significant to them. It's human

nature to want to be significant, so we have to figure out a way to get our significance in a positive manner.”

Sayson continued: “To focus intently on anything requires motivation. According to the dictionary, motivation is the desire to do something - the interest or the drive. It also is an incentive or inducement. In psychology it’s called the process that arouses, sustains and regulates human and animal behavior. Put simply, motivation is nothing more than the carrot on the stick. How do you make a horse go - put a carrot on a stick in front of him - that’s motivation. It’s simple but hugely important.”

“Everybody loves a surprise but people forget that a surprise can be good or bad news. We don’t like to get something that is not what we expected. But the only real constant in life is change. We should expect change, but the normal reaction people have to change is to get, upset or depressed. Our reaction should be one of motivation. For example, if I asked you to come up with a hundred thousand dollars by tomorrow morning you would probably say you couldn’t do it, but if I told you I have kidnapped your mother and will kill her unless you come up with a hundred thousand dollars by tomorrow morning, you would probably give me a different answer. You will somehow, magically produce the money the next day. The main difference is the motivation.”

Sayson holds that an important factor in getting far in life is the perception how far it is possible to go. He elaborated: “Let’s say you’re good at what you’re doing. Maybe you’re teaching, maybe you’re selling something. Is being ‘good’ enough? You could be excellent. But is ‘excellent’ even good enough? The answer is ‘no.’ There is yet another level beyond excellence and that is called ‘becoming outstanding.’”

“Now, what’s the difference? Well, what is the difference in time between the first place gold medalist and the second place silver medalist in an Olympic swimming event? Sometimes it’s just a fraction of a second in recorded speed. It’s the same thing

with track and field. The difference between first place and second place is literally a fraction of a second - often only a tenth or hundredths of a second. And what does the gold medalist get that the silver medalist does not get? Everything! The gold medalist gets it all, from the gold medal, to the money, to the endorsements, to the movie offers - everything. And the difference is a fraction of a second!"

In his motivational speeches, Sayson translates such examples to everyday life by maintaining that whatever one does, it sometimes requires just a little bit more effort to move to the highest level. "That extra five minutes at work doing your job," he urged, "that extra two minutes practicing a skilled activity. It can make all the difference in success. "We always have an excuse - it's five o'clock and I'm hungry. But all it takes is just a little bit of additional effort. That is the key to becoming 'outstanding.' The difference between an academic grade of an 'A' and an 'A+' may only be another twenty minutes of studying. This applies to everything. The extra effort is compared to the fraction of a second principle needed to win."

Sayson believes there are two types of motivators, positive and negative motivators. Negative motivation usually comes about through impending disaster: "The ship is sinking and you're motivated to jump overboard with your life jacket. Or will you say, 'Oh, we just hit an iceberg. I'm going to have some tea and then maybe I'll jump.' That's how some people are. They wait until the last minute, until the worst possible scenario before they get motivated enough to take action."

Positive motivation is about bettering yourself and the world around you. "Some people are motivated by a goal fulfillment," Sayson noted. "They say, 'I will become this or I will be that.' 'I can have great health and a great body.' 'I can be wealthy and I can be happy.' So which one are you? Are you a positively motivated or negatively motivated person? You need

to know because that's how you can motivate yourself. If you're positively motivated then you have to focus on the things that you want in life. If you are negatively motivated you will be sparked to take action away from the things that you don't want in life."

Another important ingredient to success is gratitude. The most successful people in the world," Jojo emphasized, "even billionaires, say that's the number one thing. Every day they wake up they are grateful. You must learn to practice to express gratitude in every moment. The simplest way is to say, 'thank you.' Not just one time but in every chance you get."

"And gratitude," he added, "starts with God. The bible tells us that God's thoughts are on a higher level than our thoughts. Sometimes we may think something bad is happening when in God's clearer perspective it may really be good for you. Usually we don't recognize it in the present moment, but later on begin to understand. So whatever happens, even if it seems to be a form of misfortune, we should say, 'Thank you, Lord. I know there is a good reason and greater purpose for this.' Have faith in the greater things we cannot yet fully comprehend and say 'thank you Lord.'"

"Do you know how many times I say 'thank you' in a day? I can't even tell you because it's every moment. Just before I begin my lectures I say, 'thank you, Lord, for this opportunity.' Gratitude is the number one ingredient to healthy living. Having gratitude means that you are aware of the good things that have happened in your life and you appreciate them. And you acknowledge that these good things have happened for a reason and they've been given unto you by the Creator. This attitude helps develop a humble spirit and become submissive to a higher intellect. That helps you get pride out of the way and that's important because pride is something that can destroy anyone. When you are free from pride, the blessings keep coming and they are accentuated even more as you live life to the fullest. In a nutshell blessings come to us but we have to in turn bless others. There has to be an

outlet to keep the blessings flowing. It has to be more like a river than a lake. God flows blessings into you, you give blessings to others and the process keeps going. If it doesn't flow from your life when you receive them it stops flowing and becomes stale."

Sayson also believes that every person has a purpose in life: "We all have some kind of a mission. It may just be for fellowship between man and God, but in the end, we all come back to God. So we need to have an objective, especially younger people need to have objectives in life. That means you should not only dream, but dream big! No matter where you are now in your life try to remember what you dreamed about becoming or achieving when you were a child. Almost everything worthwhile grew out of someone's dream. The building that you're in was someone's dream at one time. The church that I go to was someone's dream at one time. So dream! Dream big and build upon your dream."

Nancy Sayson agreed: "My husband is a dreamer, sometimes a dangerous dreamer, but over time I've gotten used to it. He wants to keep dreaming and I don't want to stop him from that. When Jojo helps someone, he usually goes all out and that means there are certain risks involved. He is always very upfront with me about these things and shares them with me. He is a very responsible husband, very caring and thoughtful. He's not perfect but somehow we learn to love each other's imperfections."

To accomplish one's dream, Sayson believes that the first requirement is to put together a plan of action. "You have to give meaning to the dream," he stated. "Ask yourself why you want this dream. Then take action on it. If you want to start your own company, then start to plan how you can do it. Put down on paper the steps you should take. And you know what? Putting the plan on paper is the first step, and as soon as you take that first step and make that plan, you are on the road to making your dream happen. So take the plunge now and begin to make your dream a reality."

Having a positive attitude is, of course, very important and Sayson extends this concept to being a “problem solver.” “Most people will just give you reasons why something can’t be done, and you need to step out of that,” he said. “You need to think how it can be done, waste not energy in finding excuses but in finding solutions!”

Just as important is being dependable. “To make your dream happen you will have to become reliable. When you say something, do you do it? How many times have you called someone over the phone and said it was important and they never called you back. When someone calls you, do you return the call? If you want to make it in life and live well, you have to fulfill your commitments. Your word needs to be worth like gold.”

Another ingredient in achieving a dream is to be compassionate, which Jojo defined as the Biblical ‘Do unto others as you would want them to do unto to you,’ one of the greatest commandments of Christ. “It goes with giving. When you give something to help somebody, doesn’t it feel good? The greatest work that a person can do sometimes is just a little painless act of kindness which is not seen by anyone else but makes a real difference to the person you are helping.”

Of course, even with all these qualities and suggested techniques in place, one must be able to concentrate on attaining their dream, and not give in to the emotional highs and lows that hinder so many people. Being under the sway of feelings is a particular problem for example, the Filipino mentality, which is so culturally based on emotion that making logical decisions is sometimes difficult. Thus, political and social progress in the nation have been hindered. That Jojo Sayson has gained such mastery over a condition that plagues the culture of his people is further testament to the power of this extraordinary man.

Since staying focused is so crucial to achieving one’s dreams and since controlling emotions is so crucial to staying

focused Sayson has gained much insight into attaining this control. He elaborated: "Emotions can make you miserable or they can make you happy. It always seems easier for most to be miserable than to be happy. Believe it or not, you have the power to choose to be happy."

"Just look at the world from the scientific principle of entropy, which means the natural tendency of everything is to deteriorate or become disorganized. Let's say you have a picket fence. What happens if you leave it alone for years and years? It degrades and starts falling apart. What happens to your health if you don't take care of it? It falls apart. You must choose to be happy. On every single day you will face a fork in the road. You can choose to be happy or miserable."

"To succeed," he reiterated, "you must be focused. If your thoughts are cluttered with irrelevant things, you are probably not paying enough attention to what you are involved in because you're not in the moment: your body is doing whatever it's doing, but your mind is somewhere else. Maybe you're thinking about a bill when you're supposed to be spending quality time with your kids."

Much of the problem with focus comes from stress. Everyone has stress, but it's what you do with the stress that counts. "Stress is a sense of urgency, strain, pressure and tension that can turn into an ugly monster that controls your life. It happens when we get caught up in the negative and let fear drive us."

"Sometimes once it builds up the only way to get rid of stress is to take time away, a mini-vacation of the mind. You can go somewhere away from everyone else. Sometimes you find yourself in the middle of nowhere, but sometimes the middle of nowhere helps you find yourself. Everyone needs to get away now and then. But some people can take a mini-vacation just by closing their eyes and meditating. Some people can take a few deep breathes and realign their mind to defocus on the stress. This is a technique that you can learn."

Some of the techniques Sayson uses for controlling emotions he learned from Anthony Robbins referenced from the science of Neuro-Linguistic Programming proposed by scientists Bandler and Grinder in the 1970's. "Number one involves changing your posture and breathing. There are many links between the brain and the body. For example, our brain affects breathing and posture, but our breathing and posture also affects our brain. Think about the posture and breathing rate of a person who is depressed. They tend to slouch and that creates shallow breathing. Everything they do tends to be slowed. And when the human body is in a slouched and drawn-in position it draws in everything and forms a reflex where you're thinking inwards about nothing else but yourself. You begin to focus on being sad or being hurt and you start to curl into a ball."

"But what about a person who just won \$10 million in the lottery? They stand upright, they yell for joy. They breathe better. They look up instead of down. These are reflexes. Whatever you feel will give you a physical manifestation. But the key is to realize that this works both ways. It is reversible. If you alter your posture and your breathing you can lift your spirits and make yourself feel better. If you change your posture to the posture of a happy person you will start to feel happy."

"Emotions are just electrical storms in the human mind and you can control them. Try it yourself. Slouch down and feel what's going on in your body. Everything begins to turn inward. You can fall asleep because it is very relaxing. Now, straighten up and inhale a big breath. Then exhale and shout 'Yes, yes!' You can feel the change. Your blood pressure rises, your mood changes. So just by changing the co-figuration of your body you can generate a different emotional response."

Does Jojo Sayson practice what he preaches? Yes! "Sometimes I will catch my body in that depressed position when I'm driving, so what I do is I straighten up and yell 'Yes!' Even, if someone in the car next to me in traffic looks at me strangely,

then I do it again. If you're starting to feel miserable, check your posture. Change it to be upright, inhale and fill your lungs with air. When you're more upright you can breathe deeper and that sends a psychological reflex up to your brain. Suddenly you're on the go - You want to do your tasks like homework perhaps or family activities, you want to create, you want to build."

Sayson's second step for controlling emotions involves using one's brain in a greater capacity. He elaborated: "The brain will answer any question you ask it. The mind is like an iceberg where the very tip of the iceberg, the part you can see, is the conscious mind and the much larger, bottom part that you can't see is the subconscious. Whenever you ask a question to your brain, your brain will process it in the subconscious until it gets an answer."

"For example, let's say you are going on a vacation. You're hurriedly packing up your things because your plane is leaving soon and you woke up a little late. So you throw in everything, slam shut the suitcase, and race out the door. As you lock the door what do you ask yourself? 'Did I forget anything?' Now, the conscious part of your brain will immediately answer 'of course not. You've got it all packed,' because that's the part of your brain you were using when you were packing."

"But now, as you head out on your trip the subconscious part of your brain begins working out to search the answer to your question. But there is a delay while it works. So what happens is that you're now half-way around the world eating peanuts on the plane, and the answer pops up: you left your teddy bear at home."

Jojo provides another example of this phenomenon: "Let's say you're at a sporting event, a concert or a festival and you run into someone you know. But you have forgotten their name. So you ask yourself who they are. The conscious brain says, 'I don't know,' but the subconscious starts working on the

answer. Three days later you're riding your bike or doing your exercises and the name pops into your mind."

How can this knowledge be applied to controlling one's emotions? Sayson says the key is learning to purposely ask the mind the proper questions. "We all ask ourselves questions but we don't state them the right way," he asserted. For example, we will ask ourselves, 'Why do I feel miserable? Why do I feel sad?' But if you ask the questions in a negative way like that, the brain will respond in a negative way and give you a negative answer. The subconscious will try to answer why you are miserable or sad and it will give you all the negative reasons that you have stored there. So the whole day or the whole week your subconscious will say things like 'You are sad because your husband left you,' or 'because you have a low paying job.' It feeds you back negative answers – it's actually giving you what you asked for. Then the mind is triggered to feel worse."

"A lot of times," noted Jojo, "when a person suddenly starts to feel sad, it's because they're getting the negative answers to the negative questions they've unknowingly asked their subconscious, and of course that triggers sadness. So the key is to ask the subconscious positive questions. Ask, things like, 'How can I be happier?' or 'How can I feel better about myself?'"

"This is how you maintain control of these messages from yourself that can trigger your mind to feeling happy or miserable," he said. "When I wake up in the morning I program my mind in a healthy way. First I make sure that I'm sitting or standing upright. Then I ask myself positive questions like 'How can I become happy today?' I'm feeding these questions from my conscious to my subconscious; 'How can I feel confident today?' 'How can I pass the examination today?' 'How can I remember what I read last night?' 'How can I be strong today?' 'How can I be loved today?'"

"These questions are framed to generate a positive response. What will happen is that subconscious will keep on

feeding me positive information throughout the day. And that positive feedback will trigger my motivation.”

“Remember that the brain doesn’t recognize ‘negative adverbs’ so if you ask ‘How can I not be sad?’ the brain will not pick up the ‘not’ but it will pick up the word ‘sad.’ To the brain that’s the same as ‘Why am I sad?’ The questions have to be positive.”

At the end of June, 2011, Jojo Sayson made another trip to the Philippines to further develop his humanitarian projects there. “Every time I go on a trip I feel excited,” he beamed, “because I know that I will connect with new people whom I can help, and who can help me as well. It is as though God leads me to them. In fact, I think that is the main purpose of my vacations - my vacations are not really for pleasure. When I go to the Philippines I usually stay inside Metro-Manila so I can meet with all sorts of people. They might be business associates, former classmates, Coast Guard colleagues or humanitarian organizations.”

And, as usual, Jojo soon connected with a humanitarian need. “When I got there,” he recounted, “I was invited by my old friend Leo Riingen to come with him to visit a village of the Aeta tribe, some very poor people that he has a great deal compassion for. This is the same group of people but a separate tribe I have been helping out with the Zambales school project.”

“This was just a quick interaction with the children and the people. The chieftain there is a kind man and I asked him where his crown was and he said he didn’t have one so I gave him my personal NASA baseball cap as a token of my respect. Now he’s the only Philippine tribal chief who wears a NASA ball cap as a crown. Now, like the song says, he can “move it, move it!””

“The Aeta tribe has been scattered all over the place ever since Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991. They resemble Aboriginal people, very small in stature, dark skinned with very curly hair. The world of the Aeta tribe is simple. They believe that the world

is comprised of two kinds of people - the curly hairs and the straight hairs. They are very short with curly hair and very poor. They like hunting and gathering firewood and their main industry is producing charcoal.”

Whenever Sayson returns to the Philippines, the media there soon report it. “I was invited by a CNN iReporter to be interviewed regarding my NASA involvement, so he came over to my hotel and we filmed a video interview that was uploaded to a iReport website. His name is Sherbien Dacalanio and he used to work for channel 2, ABS-CBN in the Philippines during the filming of my biography as the Filipino superhero. He researched the information for the biography they televised about me in 2006 and now he freelances. After the interview he showed me a video clip of a project of his, documenting a rare form of genetic disease called progeria in this little 14-year-old girl named Rochelle. A child with progeria is born with advanced aging, so you end up having a little child with the body of an elderly person. They have all the signs and illnesses associated with the elderly. I believe it is about the equivalent of 7 years of advanced aging per year of life span.”

“When I watched Sherbien’s video, I felt what I call the ‘Heavenly tap’ on my shoulder, telling me to find Rochelle.”

In a world so filled with tragedy and pain, most people are exposed to a sad but true story every now and then. The difference between Jojo Sayson and most other individuals is that he is open to the urging of the Creator, and when he feels that urging about such a story, he responds with action. “For Rochelle,” he stated, “time is running out. The known life expectancy for progeria cases is somewhere between fifteen and twenty years and she’s already 14.”

“Sherbien,” continued Sayson, “said he had been helping Rochelle, but that her greatest wish was to take her family on a vacation to this famous spot called the Boracay Island Resort.

It's where the wealthy tourists and movie stars go -- white sand beaches, very beautiful. So I told Sherbien we would document her story and asked him to meet me at the hotel a few days later. I borrowed my Aunt Jules' SUV. I wanted to take pictures of Rochelle to use to help her get her dream. I'm going to make that dream come true. I will be her Make-A-Wish' foundation."

Within days Jojo, along with Sherbien and May, a friend who wanted to help, found Rochelle in her village in the province of Bulacan. "I met her after school at a local store where she was having a snack," he continued, "and there I saw this wrinkled-skin little girl with all the physical attributes of an elderly person. But she was full of life. This girl blessed me. She had more life about her than I and most of the people I know. She was not thinking of the future - she was living in the moment. She has four sisters and a brother. They live in a squatter area and don't really have their own property. The people there create makeshift homes out of whatever they can get. Rochelle fends for her family and helps her mother sell some second-hand household items at the marketplace anything from old clothes to shoes, whatever they can sell."

"People tend to buy from her because of her appearance. she is unique-looking and I think they have compassion for her. So she ends up having more sales than anyone else. She also likes to sing so she would go to a Karaoke bar and per-form and she'll get a lot of tips. So she supports her family."

Sayson was moved even more by this little girl when he learned her background. "Her father left the family when Rochelle was younger. It was reported that he was disappointed by her birth defects and had physically hurt her. Even so, she desperately wanted to see him again. Meeting her and hearing her sing was just an amazing, blessed experience. I brought her some food and things and I gave the mother some money. When we were ready to leave Rochelle was sitting on a mattress on the

floor and I knelt in front of her and said, ‘Rochelle, you know I was sent here by Jesus, right?’ And she gave me this angelic nod. I said, ‘I want you to know that I will help you. Jesus wants me to do so.’ I then made the sign of the cross on her forehead with my thumb, kissed her forehead, and we left.”

After donating money to the family and imparting words of encouragement, most people would move on with their lives and not give much thought to a poor girl with a bizarre ailment in the faraway Philippines. But not Jojo Sayson. “Because of this I created a Foundation called Project Michelangelo,” he said. “Michelangelo means ‘a messenger who resembles God.’ As soon as I returned to America we began the paperwork to legally form this charity organization and began working on the website. I’ve had thoughts before of creating a Foundation, but it was seeing Rochelle that made me do it now. This way I can help people and have full discretion for how the funds are used.” Jojo has always taken seriously all, projects belonging to other Foundations in the past. His disappointment with the large sum of monies he raised and the unfinished school building project appointed him for the Aeta tribe made him decide more that now is the time to own his own Foundation: no politics, all God.

Project Michelangelo linked together a group of people who had helped Sayson in other humanitarian efforts. The International Board of Directors and officers comprise Sherrie Gearheart as Vice-President, Vicki Valentine as Secretary and Treasurer, Dr. Ted Esguerra as Chief Medical Officer, Meiling Jin as Chinese Ambassador, Leo Riingen, CEO of Informatics as Information Technology Consultant, Sally Maniego Sioson as the International Events Consultant, Sherbien Dacalanio as our official videographer, Dr. Imelda Cruz-Banting as Director of our Medical Team, Dr. Grace Zamora-Roldan as Director of Women’s and children’s Empowerment, Jennifer Mussman as Administrative Executive Director , Jackie Schiffer as Public

Relations consultant and Veronica Pantaleon as Philippine Missions Coordinator.”

Ever aware of the cosmic river of possibilities in his life, Sayson recognized a vital lesson in another aspect of Rochelle’s story. “I was told that Rochelle’s father had used a heavy hand with her. Then, after he left he got into a squabble with another man and that hand was chopped off by a machete. Now he must live without a hand. It was poetic justice of some sort. It’s as if God was telling the world that if you hurt small children you may bring the wrath of God onto yourself.”

Project Michelangelo with Sherbien’s help was able to reunite Rochelle with her father and send the whole family to Boracay Island for Rochelle’s dream vacation.

On this trip to the Philippines, Sayson also visited the C.H.I.L.D. Haus he had helped support for children with cancer. “My old high school friends went with me,” he related. “I dressed up as Superman and we gave them food and toys. The Haus was in its last days of operation at Quezon City. They had to move to a new location because of financial difficulties. The culture of Philippine governance does not easily lend itself to the true ideals of charity. First of all, corruption is rampant. Also, there is a mentality there that I really don’t like. It’s called ‘ningas kugon,’ and it refers to the idea that if you set a haystack on fire it will flare up big time but then the flames will disappear almost immediately. The saying means that culture has an element when people often gets fired up about a project but then the motivation would fizzle out soon because they don’t follow through with it. Many cultures worldwide share this human motivational flaw. Motivated leadership I believe, is the solution.”

On December 17th when Jojo returned back to the States, a powerful typhoon slammed into the Philippine island of Mindanao and destroyed two major cities, Cagayan de Oro and Iligan City. Over a thousand people lost their lives and thousands more were

injured or missing, buried in mudslides or carried away by floods. Project Michelangelo quickly moved in to help. "I have a few Project Michelangelo volunteers in the Philippines and they asked me if we could help." Jojo recalled. "Sherbien with Veronica and volunteers were able to get some donations from a major chain store. The store is called SM which stands for Shoe Mart and through their donations we were able to feed over five hundred families. We were able to obtain an army truck so we went from village to village with food. These were mostly Muslim families so it was a case of Christians helping Muslims. I've been told that in the Quran there are two archangels who are prominently mentioned and one of them is the archangel Michael. It was interesting that it was SM stores who provided us with food, soap, medicines and so on that we distributed to the people and SM is also a known acronym for Saint Michael. To me that was an affirmation that we were doing a mission from Saint Michael. On February 3, 2012 we sent back more volunteers to Iligan City and SM stores again donated food and supplies to help another five hundred people. Then to my joyful surprise, we found out that the Patron Saint of Iligan City was none other than St. Michael. Was this coincidence or God's synchronicity? I think the latter."

Even with the ever-increasing number of projects that placed such a high demand upon his life Jojo Sayson tries to remain open to new ideas. "Especially leadings from God," he emphasized. "One must be open to hearing or feeling that God is nudging you to do something for someone. That's one of the ways He works."

One such leading came when Sayson received a personal letter from an inmate at the jail of Kankakee County, Illinois, where Jojo resides. Dennis "D.J." Martin Jr. was 24 and incarcerated for his third time. He had developed a strong addiction to marijuana when his father started him smoking at the age of eight. He was writing Jojo for help. "I heard about all the things Jojo was doing

from some friends,” Martin said, “and I decided to contact him and ask what advice he might have to help me on my own personal road to success. I’ve written one of two other successful people for this kind of help and they never replied, but Jojo answered right away.”

“The letter was very encouraging. He gave me some solid advice. One of the things he told me to do was to write down my goals and practice visualizing them coming true. My first real goal is to become a more positive person so I can overcome the things of my past that have been dragging me down.”

When Sayson writes D.J., he is always encouraging and insistent on becoming outstanding, Martin said. “There’s always some homework in his letters – something I can practice that will help me. It’s usually tied to a scripture from the Bible. He also advises me to offer my work to the Lord and ask that He will guide me.”

Sayson has gone beyond the exchange of letters and actually completed the process of joining the prison’s ministry visitation program so he now meets with D.J. in person and prays with him directly. “Jojo is a great mentor because he has so much insight about so many things,” Martin reflected. “He encourages me to ‘open the window of my mind’ and see myself as successful in the future. Jojo says that what we see and believe is what will come to pass. He’s told me to pray for those who insult me or don’t believe in me because basically I will leave them behind as my dreams become reality.”

Martin now has completed a prison education program and obtained his GED (General Educational Development), and is cultivating the kind of inner motivation that it takes to overcome his circumstances. He says that what he’s learned from Jojo is invaluable. “I go over his letters and it really makes a lot of sense. Then I try to get my mind to embrace the truth of it so I can apply it to my life. I have regular physical workout schedule and as I

work out I go over the things that Jojo has taught me in my mind, and I envision succeeding. I know that Jojo really cares, I was depressed being in jail on Christmas day when I was surprised when I got called by the guard that I have a visitor...it was Jojo”

“And succeed he will,” Jojo Sayson affirmed. “It’s all about determination and will power.”

Epilogue

On April 14, 2012, the 20th Anniversary of Alfredo Sayson’s death, Jojo’s mother, Elvina Sayson, had a dream in which his father said he had a message for Jojo. The message was as follows: ‘Naniniwala ako sa iyo’ which translates to “I believe in you.” Then he continued what his Dad said... “Keep on going...I will walk behind you,” Jojo took the message to heart.

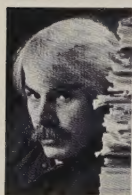
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Springboard to Heaven

The Jojo Sayson Adventure

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- Research Scientist, National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA) Human Research Program, University of California, San Diego
- Physical Therapist and Doctor of Manual Therapy
- Adventurer, Philanthropist and Philosopher
- Founded The Alliance of Superheroes for children with cancer
- Lieut. Commander, Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary, 103rd Squadron
- Choreographer for Bodybuilding, Fitness, Beauty Pageant, and Professional Modeling Events
- Founded Project Michelangelo Foundation



JAMES RIORDAN

Rare is it that any author will have one of his books described as the definitive work on a particular subject, but such a distinction has been bestowed by critics on no less than four books written by James Riordan. The New York Times Bestseller, *Break on Through*, Riordan's biography of Doors lead singer Jim Morrison, has not only been called "the most objective, thorough and professional Morrison biography" by the Times Book Review, but also named as one of the Ten All Time Best Rock Biographies by Amazon.com. Riordan's *The Platinum Rainbow* was called "One of the best how-to books ever written" by the Los Angeles Daily News and critics described his *The Bishop of Rwanda* as "one of the most important books you'll ever read." *The Coming of the Walrus*, Riordan's novel about the 60s has been called "the definitive book on the era." The author of twenty-seven books, James Riordan has won three Tellys, seven Crystal Communicators and been nominated for a Chicago/Midwest Emmy for Television writing.

"Terrific story! Everybody has something to learn from Jojo Sayson's biography. It's a roller coaster ride through heartache and joy; despair and hope; challenge and success. Arriving in the USA as a naive immigrant, Jojo stitched himself into the tapestry that is America...and used gold thread to do so! He's a shining example of self-fulfillment in the face of very long odds. Be inspired!"

Astronaut Mike Mullane, Author, *Riding Rockets, The Outrageous Tales of a Space Shuttle Astronaut.*

"An inspirational story about an exceptional man, Jojo Sayson has accomplished so much and done so with dignity and humility. Godspeed as you continue to reach for the stars."

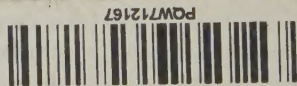
Astronaut Robert Springer, Colonel, United States Marine Corps (Retired), Motivational Speaker

"When Jojo Sayson was a boy growing up in the Philippines, he was fascinated by Superheroes. His success does not come from a magical planet. He has become the remarkable man by a combination of dreams, faith, determination, and hard work. This book is his story, and you will be inspired by it. On getting to know Jojo's history, you will realize your potential can be realized and your dreams can come true – his did, because he made them do so!"

Ira Fistell, Veteran of thirty-eight years on the air as a Radio and TV personality and author of *Ira Fistell's Mark Twain*

"The story of Jojo Sayson is one of the quintessential American dreams. Not of fame, financial wealth. It's a journey of spirit that is inspirational and motivational and shows how we can achieve their dreams with dedication."

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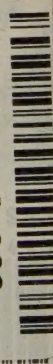


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